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THE EXTENSION OF IMPERIAL AUTHORITY UNDER DIOCLETIAN AND THE
TETRARCHY, 285-305CE.

by

JOSHUA EDWARD PETITT
B.A. History, University of Central Florida 2009

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of History
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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2012

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ABSTRACT

Despite a vast amount of research on Late Antiquity, little attention has been paid to certain figures that prove to be influential during this time. The focus of historians on Constantine I, the first Roman Emperor to allegedly convert to Christianity, has often come at the cost of ignoring Constantine's predecessor, Diocletian, sometimes known as the "Second Father of the Roman Empire". The success of Constantine's empire has often been attributed to the work and reforms of Diocletian, but there have been very few studies of the man beyond simple biography. This work will attempt to view three of Diocletian's major innovations in order to determine the lasting effect they had over the Roman Empire and our modern world. By studying 1) Diocletian's assumption of new, divinely inspired titles; 2) Diocletian's efforts at controlling prices in the marketplace; and 3) Diocletian's Persecution of the Christians in the Roman Empire at the turn of the fourth century CE, we can gain valuable insight into the ways through which Roman Emperors extended their authority throughout different facets of Ancient World, including developments that would shape the future of Western Civilization for the next 1400 years.

This work is lovingly dedicated to my Father, Edward Petitt, who shared my love of history from the beginning, but sadly could not be there for the end; to my Mother, Laura Petitt, no one has done more to put me in the position I am in today; and to my Wife Darby, my inspiration for, and respite from, my work

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

<i>DMP</i>	<i>De Mortibus Persecutorum</i>
GEN MAX	Genethliacus of Maximian
<i>HA</i>	<i>Historia Augusta</i>
<i>HE</i>	<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
ILS	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>
PAN MAX	Panegyric to Maximian
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vita Constantini</i>

INTRODUCTION

When the Roman Emperor Diocletian climbed a hill 5 kilometers from his residence at Nicomedia in May of 305 CE, he intended something no other Emperor had ever done. Standing in nearly the exact spot where, 21 years earlier, he had been proclaimed emperor of the Roman Empire by the armies of Rome, surrounded by those same armies, Diocletian abdicated his position, and retired to his private residence at Split, in Dalmatia, near his birthplace¹. No other emperor in Roman history had ever formally abdicated his position to another before death, yet it is safe to say that Diocletian was like no other emperor the Roman Empire had ever seen.

Diocletian (r. 284-305 CE) is one of the more interesting figures in ancient history for several reasons. As Augustus, he presided over a resurging Roman Empire that had seen decades of revolt, civil war, external pressure and the threat of collapse. He has been commonly named the “Second Founder of Rome” for the lasting reforms implemented under his rule. There has been little focus of study on Diocletian by historians, however, mostly because he has always been overshadowed by his eventual successor Constantine, the first Christian emperor. The study of Diocletian’s administrative innovations and reforms, and the reinvention of authority in the last decades of the third century has the ability to add a great deal of depth and understanding to historians’ views on the discourse of authority in the Empire, and tensions between the traditional and a changing world. I am undertaking an examination of these questions via a study of three of Diocletian’s most innovative changes: the assumption of divine names by Diocletian and his partner in the Dyarchy, Maximian to go along with the formation of a complex political

¹ Appendix B, Figure 2.

system that would later evolve into what we today call the Tetrarchy; the failed attempt by Diocletian to impose fixed prices in the Edict on Maximum Prices in 301; and the persecution of the Christians in the Empire through the Edicts of 303. This will help us to better understand how Roman emperors created, reconstructed, and disseminated authority and legitimacy during Late Antiquity, as well as the ways in which Roman citizens reacted to imperial authority. This will necessarily be confined to the period in which Diocletian was Emperor, or *Augustus*, roughly 284 CE to 303 CE.

When Diocletian was proclaimed emperor in 284, he eventually brought stability to an empire that had seen dozens different emperors in the previous one hundred years. The end of the reign of Marcus Aurelius in 180 served as the watershed point for the Crisis of the Third Century, as this period is known amongst historians. In order to better understand Diocletian's reign and the Roman world over which he took dominion, we must familiarize ourselves with the decades following the death of Marcus Aurelius.

Historical Background

When Marcus Aurelius died in 180, he left his biological son Lucius Commodus as emperor, breaking with the tradition of adopting a qualified leader and naming him heir. This would prove to be a mistake that would help create the turbulent historical context that formed Diocletian and the Empire he inherited. Commodus was unpopular and ineffectual, and was eventually assassinated in 192, beginning the Crisis of the Third Century. The year 193 was known as the Year of Five Emperors, and would begin a trend of civil war that would not truly be halted until the formation of the Tetrarchy. From 193 to 284, the Roman Empire would see no less than 31 men crowned emperor, even without counting the so-called "Thirty Pretenders" that

the *Historia Augusta* alludes to during the reigns of Valerian and Gallienus.² The result of this incredible turnover at the highest position of government was not only several generations of Romans who did not know what to expect of their rulers, but of generations of Roman rulers that were formed in the crucible of civil war, which would prove formative to their ruling styles, goals and ambitions. Further, it created in Diocletian a sense of urgency in reconstructing the fount of Imperial authority. The result, discussed here later, will lay the foundation for centuries of monarchical rule by divine right.

The civil wars of 193 ended with Septimus Severus as the new emperor, though he had a short period of time in which to attempt to consolidate power and attempt reform; this trend would continue with Aurelian and Diocletian later in the century. I have juxtaposed these three emperors for a reason: all three were successful in consolidating power following a time of civil war, allowing them to attempt very similar reforms. It can be argued that many of Diocletian's successful reforms carried out at the end of the third century were in actuality continuations of reforms begun by Marcus Aurelius, Septimus Severus, and Aurelian. It could even be argued further that the true culmination of these reforms would be under Constantine I when he became sole emperor of the Roman Empire for a period of 26 years, a length of reign for a single man unheard of since the death of Marcus Aurelius. It is also important to note that under each of these four Emperors prior to Constantine I there are similar actions being taken: reform of

² *Historia Augusta*. Trans. Bill Thayer.
http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Historia_Augusta/Carus_et_al*.html.
Accessed electronically, September, 2011.

coinage and the economy, bureaucratic reform, and the persecution of Christians.³ I believe that there is more than coincidence that the four most successful consolidators of power attempted the very same actions during their reigns.

Aside from the military unrest caused by civil war, Diocletian took over a Roman Empire that was rapidly changing as a society. In terms of religion, Christianity was becoming increasingly visible and popular, as were a number of “Eastern cults” that were different than traditional pagan religion. The emperors Elagabalus and Aurelian, among others, had promoted a brand of monotheism in supporting the cult of a sun god. That these forms of monotheism were ultimately unsuccessful at replacing the polytheistic traditional Roman paganism not part of this analysis. What is important to note is that according to the sources who lived during this time, a belief that Rome was diminished as a result of the abandonment of traditional belief pervaded not only learned writing, but everyday life.

There were also significant tensions between religious groups in the Empire, that predated the Great persecution of Christians under the reign of Diocletian. The first organized persecution of Christians began under Nero in the first century, and under the reign of Trajan there was a crackdown on secret societies, which Christianity was considered to be. However, according to WHC Frend, until the third century persecution of Christians was typically the result of a mob reacting to local tensions rather than the imposition of punishments by Imperial officials.⁴ Under Hadrian and then Trajan there was official reluctance to seek out Christians for

³ In the case of Aurelian, there is no evidence of actual persecution, but a commonly held belief in the sources that a persecution was imminent at the time of his death.

⁴ WHC Frend. *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*. Cambridge: James Clark and Co., 1965.

punishment, although those who came forward were often punished. This continued under Marcus Aurelius, although during his reign the popular pogroms against Christians such as the massacre at Lyons in 177 became quite bloody. During the third century this would change. There were sporadic persecutions under Septimus Severus, Maximinus Thrax, Decius, Valerian, and Aurelian; Severus outlawed the conversions of pagans to either Judaism or Christianity. These sporadic persecutions would lay the stage for the Great Persecution that would take place under Diocletian in 303.

The Roman Empire, once thought of as invincible, had very nearly fallen to invasion several times in the third century. Even though Rome won the three Gothic wars waged between 249-270, the amorphous borders on the frontier of the Empire proved difficult for Rome to maintain. The settlement of captured Goths as farmers in these areas was seen by some as a triumph in co-opting the enemy into the Empire, but others saw only an insidious enemy on Roman soil. The wars that the Empire fought with Persia during this time were even more disastrous. Though Septimus Severus had some success in battle against the Persians, later emperors would be defeated or driven back time and again. The most humiliating defeat was the capture of the Emperor Valerian by Persian forces in 259, leading to a crisis not only in Roman politics, where the rule of Gallienus produced the Thirty Pretenders to the purple, but also a crisis in Imperial identity, as Valerian was held in captivity until his death, reportedly being subjugated to terrible and degrading punishments. I argue that the Imperial identity crisis was a deciding factor in many of Diocletian's attempts to create a new Imperial identity and authority at the end of the third century.

Several provinces had split off from the Roman Empire during the tumult of the third century. The most extreme example of these was Palmyrene Empire, under the queen Zenobia. The authors of the *Historia Augusta* make a point of pointing out that Gallienus' rule was so terrible that even women could rule and rule well in his stead.⁵ Palmyra was eventually subdued by Aurelian, and Zenobia returned to Rome in chains, but the effort required was considerable. There was also the short lived Gallic Empire which had some success in defending against efforts to return it to the Empire. The success was enough to force Aurelian to offer clemency to the Emperor of the Gallic Empire, in return for the restoration of the provinces with little bloodshed. The local brand of provincial patriotism that these states engendered is interesting in that Diocletian would have to deal with his own splinter empire, when the rebel Carausius fled to Britain and proclaimed himself *Augustus*. This insurrection would prove to be important to the ways in which Diocletian would define his own authority, while undermining that of his rivals.

The city of Rome, once seen as the jewel of the Empire and center of Imperial government, was rapidly losing out to eastern cities as cultural and administrative centers. The senate no longer was the zenith of power in the Empire, instead seeming to be a collection of old men who were constantly executed for plotting against the emperor. The reign of Marcus Aurelius again appears as a watershed in which the Senate's power and influence with the Emperor had reached its apex and would decline. Diocletian indeed is an acute example of this, as he refused to visit Rome until his Vicenallia in 303. It was a popularly held belief, as reported in the *Historia Augusta*, that the Senate and Army had debated back and forth on the succession

⁵ *HA* 30.1.

following the murder of Aurelian, with neither side wanting the responsibility for choosing a new Emperor.⁶ Regardless of the veracity of this story, it is true that the Rubicon had metaphorically been crossed again, and that during the Crisis of the Third Century, the Senate forever ceded its right to choose the next Emperor to the Army.

Rome the city was no longer the center of Imperial life. Emperors during this period spent very little time in the city as rulers, owing to the fact that so many of the military campaigns being fought required the personal presence of the *Augustus* himself. Added to this was the increasing importance of the Eastern border with Persia, where it seemed all of the action and profit was to be had. The heart of the Empire, the bureaucracy that really made everything run, was less and less a part of the city of Rome, and increasingly centered in the East. These reasons contributed to Diocletian's decision to situate his capital at Nicomedia, just as Constantine would later decide to construct his new capital at Constantinople.

In addition to these changes in Roman power structures, there was social mobility on a larger scale than ever seen before, as administrators and soldiers were able to rise in rank faster and further than ever before. No doubt much of this was caused by the upheavals of the Crisis of the Third Century, but there were also the reforms of the Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Septimus Severus, which attempted to position those who had the ability to govern the Empire, rather than the pedigree. This caused consternation with the usually pagan aristocratic classes, since a percentage of these upwardly mobile Roman citizens were followers of strange monotheistic religions. The product of these changes, among others, was a Roman Empire where citizens were no longer utterly certain of their standing with each other, or with their emperor.

⁶ *HA* 41.1-15.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Diocletian embarked on a series of ambitious and innovative reform projects in large part determined by the context of the Crisis of the Third Century. He revolutionized and expanded the military and civil service, divided the Empire into new provinces, and introduced almost universal taxation across the Empire. Some of the more ambitious and innovative reforms, however were not totally successful, and will be the subject of this study. In the year 286, as the Dyarchy was instituted by Diocletian as the system of imperial government, he and his co-emperor, Maximian took on divine names identifying them with the patron deities of Jupiter and Hercules. This system of using divine authority to both legitimize and to define their relationship of rule would further evolve when two *Caesars* were elevated to form the Tetrarchy in 293. In 301, Diocletian introduced the near disastrous Edict on Maximum Prices that attempted to fix the prices of goods and wages and instead lead to rioting and revolt. Then in 303, Diocletian and his *Caesar* Galerius began what is known as the “Great Persecution” of Christians in the Empire who refused to swear loyalty to the Emperor and his pagan divinities. These three actions need to be examined in light not only of the historical circumstances that prompted the Emperor to act, but also the historical process by which the Emperor extended his authority through these acts over the Roman people.

Historiography

For those unfamiliar with the study of ancient history, it will be helpful to begin with a brief survey of the study of the ancient world. As well as examining some of the most important trends that shaped the general tenor of this historiography, I will examine some of the historical context that motivated the evolving nature of questions that were asked about the ancient world in general. With this background, I will then go into more detail about specific historiographical

debates that center on the topics of this thesis, as well as addressing some of the shortcomings of previous studies, and the dominant narrative they are based upon.

The historiography of the ancient world and the particular period this thesis will address can be traced back as far as the ancient scholars Tacitus and Eusebius. Tacitus (56-117 CE) held a remarkable amount of influence on studies of the Roman Empire from his rediscovery during the Renaissance until the nineteenth century, serving as the model which all historical studies attempted to emulate. The study of Tacitus and the Classics formed generations of scholars who studied the past, and proved to have a lasting influence on the questions they asked in their studies. Eusebius (263-339 CE) was integral to the creation of a narrative that outlasted any other about the period of the Tetrarchy. His *Ecclesiastical History* and biography of Constantine created a Christian centric narrative with a teleological bend of Constantine's victory that exists to this very day. The narrative provided by Eusebius has proven the bedrock of all study of the Tetrarchic period from the time of Eusebius to today; although different generations of historians have asked very different questions about this period, owing to their own historical circumstances, the narrative has remained unchallenged. This is not to say that the study of the ancient world has remain unchanged; rather a sort of stagnation has set in whereupon scholars seek to ask questions about the past, but apply their conclusions to the same paradigm that existed before

The result of this unfortunate stagnation of historical thought has lead to the formation of a dominant paradigm for the Third and Fourth Centuries that existed unquestioned by historians until the recent past, a paradigm characterized by a remarkable lack of historical debate. Reassessing portions of this paradigm is one of the main goals of this thesis, yet it is difficult to

overturn centuries of scholarship dominated by one narrative; as a result of this fact there have been relatively few dissenting voices among scholars. Yet the question of this period is no longer a fixed and immutable answer, and this has created space for other narratives for historians to view the period of the Tetrarchy. Before examining specific examples of diverging narratives, we must examine the dominant paradigm of this period, as well as how it was constructed.

The Eusebian narrative of the Tetrarchy has always portrayed Diocletian as a pagan general, another in a long line of Illyrian Emperors who ruled during the Crisis of the Third Century. This general seized power after the supposed murder of his Emperor, consolidated his gains and became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire. However, the Emperor reached too far in attempting to restore the Empire to its traditional greatness, inspiring great strife with his reforms. Diocletian styled himself a god in taking the name of Jupiter as his own; he caused food riots with a misguided attempt to set maximum prices; the Emperor, growing weaker with sickness in his later years, then persecutes innocent Christians under the influence of his younger cohort, the *Caesar* Galerius. The noble Constantine I, passed over for promotion in the Tetrarchy, flees to his dying father's side, the *Caesar* who never persecuted the Christians. From there, the Empire descends into civil war upon Diocletian's retirement until Constantine can consolidate the Empire after a vision from God grants him victory over the last remaining Tetrarch. The Christians of the Roman Empire are ultimately victorious as Constantine converts to Christianity, leading to a new Roman Empire, under the Christian God.

Applying trends in historiography as a whole to the historiography of the ancient world has often proven difficult. The study of the Roman empire did not see a resurgence until the time of the Renaissance, although the study of the Classics was a bedrock of education. In terms of

history writing, the break that existed between the Christian world and the Roman past precluded study until the sixteenth century and the Renaissance. Before this, history writing was limited to mainly ecclesiastical histories, which are different than what we recognize as historical writing today. These histories were dominated by narrative, telling stories for posterity, rather than truly examining the past. There was little historical or source criticism, and this was the context which solidified the hold of the Eusebian narrative. However, in the following centuries we will see that the study of the past will follow important intellectual trends whose influence can be traced to the present day.

The Renaissance not only introduced renewed interest in the Roman past, but it provided and impetus for scholarly learning to go beyond the religious, allowing for the gathering of knowledge for the sake of better understanding the past. There was an intense drive to collect and preserve manuscripts and relics of the past, leading to the formations of hundreds of libraries, mostly privately owned. The field of archaeology can trace its roots to this time, and that field in particular has done much to aid historians in their studies of the past. Also important were two linguistic developments during this time. The first was the re-discovery of a pure form of Latin, divorced from the guttural form that had survived over the centuries. This allowed the reading of many manuscripts from the past in their original forms, rather than through centuries of copies and translations. Second, there was a drive to publish scholarly works in vernacular languages, rather than in Latin. This allowed the findings of scientists and the writings of historians and philosophers to be extended to a far wider range of audiences than ever before.

At this time, however, the field of history were still not in a form as we would recognize it today. Historians were mainly readers of texts, compilers of information, without necessarily

analyzing it. The most important historical work related to the ancient world that came from this time period was Laurentius Valla's treatise which proved the Donation of Constantine to have been written centuries later than originally believed. Published in 1517, Valla was one of the first historians to introduce historical criticism into the study of the past. The closest thing to modern historians in the sixteenth century were antiquarians, collectors of antiques. These collections of relics were often put on display in private homes, the first versions of museums. The most important distinction to note at this time is the divorce between antiquarians, concerned with the import of physical evidence of the past, and historians, who were still concerned wholly with the narrative and literary past. This divorce between the literary and the physical is one of the more important changing trends of historiography.

The seventeenth century produced some very important intellectual trends that would prove influential on the writing of history. The Scientific Revolution questioned not only the authority of religion, but also caused historians to become more interested in different source material for their studies, meaning the narrative as the entirety of history began to lose its primacy. The growing overseas colonies of European nations called into question the role of Roman colonies of the Empire in the past. History writing began to be produced for consumption and reflection, rather than posterity, another emerging trend.

The writing of history also began to look for deeper meaning, rather than re-telling the past. Scholars such as Placido Puccinelli began to examine subjects such as prosopography, the study of names in order to gain historical context. Even ecclesiastical historians were part of these trends. Louis-Sebastian le Nain de Tillemont, a respected church scholar, wrote a history of

the first six centuries that was widely acclaimed.⁷ Tillemont's style was dry, shocking for a field which still relied on the literary appeal of narrative, but his research was impeccable and he was generally regarded as highly accurate. The success that Tillemont found without having a flair for dramatic narrative is indicative of the shifting focus of history writing, and his work would be highly cited by the preeminent historians of the eighteenth century, such as Edward Gibbon.

When discussing the historiography of study on the Roman Empire in the eighteenth century, the discussion often begins and ends with Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. However, to limit the discussion to Gibbon, influential as he has been, would be a mistake. The eighteenth century saw an explosion not only of historical writings, but also of new ideas, intellectual trends, and ways of expressing ones self. The context not only of the Enlightenment, but of expanding colonial empires, the juxtaposition of absolutism and democracy, a commercialized European society, and the continued importance of science and objectivism created the context into which neo-classicalism was born. The reinterpretation of the Greek and Roman past in order to describe the modern world had great influence on the writing of history about that past. The historians of the eighteenth century took to their studies of the past in order to ask questions that were important to their historical context. Anti-clericalism expressed itself in Pietro Giannone's attack on the hagiography of ecclesiastical writing. The revolutions in France and America created questions about the Roman and Greek democracies, as well as the rights of citizens and men. Most importantly, writers such as Voltaire began to

⁷ Louis-Sebastian le Nain de Tillemont. *Histoire des empereurs et autres princes qui ont régné pendant les six premiers siècles de l'Église* (1690). *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles*. (1693)

question what the nature of human history was, which truly opened the doors to histories of the *long durée* as well as modern social and cultural histories.

The historical works of Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Giambattista Vico created an environment of history writing that was supposed to be rational, logical, and objective. Added to the great philosophical writing of Hume, Burke and Hobbes, the context in which Gibbon wrote *Decline and Fall* shows that a paradigm shift was now possible. Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, long considered the seminal, modern work of history on the Roman Empire. Gibbon attempted to overturn the teleology of Constantine's victory, while maintained the continuity of the Eusebian narrative. Gibbon portrayed the Roman world as stale and failing beneath the weight of a disinterested citizenry, who were so enamored of the life after death promised by Christianity that they allowed their secular society to crumble. In Gibbon's most notable move, he focused on primary sources from the periods he studied, instead of later writings, and was among the first to examine the structures of the Empire along with recounting the Emperors and their wars.⁸ Gibbon has been given a great deal of credit for his history of the Roman Empire, and it proved to have lasting influence, but is important to note that Gibbon's work was a creation of the time in which he lived, times that changed greatly between 1776, when he began writing, and 1788 when he finished. However, the importance of the eighteenth century in the writing of history in general, and the study of the ancient world in particular, should not be underestimated. The modern field of history owes much to these historians from

⁸ Edward Gibbon. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. 1781-89. Edited, abridged by Hans-Friedrich Mueller. New York: The Modern Library, 2003.

centuries ago, and to study ancient Rome means to know and understand the influence of Gibbon and his contemporaries.

Like the historians of the eighteenth century, the historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who studied the ancient world created a lasting impression on the field of history. Until the 1980's, this period was the most original and innovative in terms of asking new questions about the ancient world, and applying the conclusions to the contemporary world. Like the century previous, the historians of this period such as Theodor Mommsen, Leopold Von Ranke, Charles Dezobry, Ronald Syme, and Mikhail Rostovtzeff viewed the past through the lens of their contemporary context, and this determined the questions they asked of the past, as well as the purposes to which the study of history was bent.

During this period, the study of the past began to be used for more than gathering knowledge; by controlling the past or by understanding it better, it was believed that nations could gain greater control of the present. This was a time of nationalism and the building of nations. Interested in the creation of a unified Germany, historians such as Mommsen questioned the construction of the Roman Empire and its collective identity; meanwhile, decades later Ronald Syme would be inspired to take an in-depth look at Roman political life by the creation of fascist states in Germany and Italy. Likewise this was a time of great leaders, when often a single man such as Bismarck would be seen to represent an entire nation; this explains why many biographies of the Caesars became popular during this period. This period can be characterized as a time of competition, not only between nations, but between the historians of each nation as they strove to understand and utilize the past in their nation's struggle for dominance. Mommsen

became one of this era's most influential figures, publishing numerous texts such as *The History of Rome*⁹, but also serving as a politician and personality in his native Germany.

The historiography of this period can be characterized by several important trends. The first was the continued application of scientific techniques and the attempts at objectivity, carried over from the previous period. The second was the increased use of source material of all different types in research of the past. The work of Leopold Von Ranke was instrumental in creating what we recognize today as modern, source-based history. These sources also increasingly went beyond the narrative, the third major trend of this period. It is at this time that we find the majority of collections of epigraphic evidence, coinage, and architectural evidence of the ancient world being catalogued, categorized, and collected for the purpose of creating vast banks of knowledge for historians to draw upon. The *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* that this thesis uses was comprised by Dessau during this very time period. Not only were scientific techniques applied to the writing of history, but they were also applied to the collection of evidence and source material for historians to use.

There are more historians to highlight that proved influential upon later generations that were active during this period. The writings of Marx and Engels of course continue to have great influence over the field of history, opening doors to studies based on economics and class struggle; the two often discussed the ancient world as historians. Nietzsche as a philologist had considerable influence, although his decided anti-nationalism stance served as a voice of dissent during this period. Finally, Mikhail Rostovtzeff, writing during the early twentieth century,

⁹ Theodor Mommsen, *The History of Rome*. 1854-1856.

produced many influential works on the Roman empire that viewed the economic and social history divorced from the narrative that had pervaded previous works.

The influence of this generation of historians can be seen to the 1960's and 1970's when the next shift in the historiography of the ancient world would occur. The view of Roman religion during the second and third centuries as failing paganism being overwhelmed by a dominating Christianity had been taken for granted until Peter Brown argued for a new interpretation.¹⁰ Brown argued that rather than being in decline, paganism was lively and adaptive during this period. Likewise, he argued that the Roman world was neither stagnant nor doomed to fall, reversing Gibbon's teleology, but was healthy and vibrant. Brown coined a new term, "Late Antiquity", to cover the time period from the end of the Crisis of the Third Century, where this thesis begins, and the beginning of medieval history in the eighth century. Rather than viewing this period in the same light as Classical Antiquity, or the period of the Roman Republic and early Empire, Brown argued this periodization of ancient history would better describe the transition of the Western world to the Middle Ages. This work has been influential for two reasons: first it has helped dispel the concept of this period as a time only of societal collapse, the so-called "Dark Ages"; second, the periodization of Late antiquity can allow historians to view the formative events of these centuries as a transitional period in Western History rather than a break between the Classical past and the Middle Ages.

In recent terms, the study of the ancient world has often lagged behind the rest of the field in adopting new trends and ways of writing history, often to its detriment. The changes of

¹⁰ Peter Brown. *The World of Late Antiquity*. New York: WW Norton and Company. 1971.

the 1960's and 1970's, with the rise of New history, social history and cultural history, did not have a dramatic effect in the study of Late Antiquity until years later. Indeed, historians of the Antique world had been criticized as being “doggedly old-fashioned”¹¹ as early as the late 1970's and resistant to accept the changes that the field of history was undergoing. While there have been some fascinating social, cultural, and gender studies of the Roman Empire, the majority of works still focus on men and events rather than the changing people of the time, a focus on individuals rather than the institutions they create. Historians of the Antique world could be rightly categorized one of the last stands of conservative “Modern history” against the rising tides of cultural and social history which have firmly established themselves in other areas of the field.

One reason that the Eusebian narrative became the paradigm for histories written of the this period was the body of evidence available to scholars of Late Antiquity, coupled with a hesitancy to move beyond the literary. For most of the histories of Rome, the focus on emperors, battles, and events had been driven by the source material. The focus of the surviving literature of the Antique world can often preclude conclusions about anything but these subjects. The historians who created the narrative that became the paradigm often limited themselves to only literary sources in order to write their histories.¹² This does not mean that these prior histories are worthless; rather they paint a more incomplete picture of the Ancient world than later histories,

¹¹ M.I. Finley. “Progress in Historiography”. *Daedalus* 106, No. 3 (Summer 1977). 125-142.

¹² Examples of this include Frensd and Dodds, who limit themselves almost wholly to source material that is of this nature; Millar, publishing in proximity to these two, attempted to step beyond this paradigm by looking at the influence of the Emperor across the entirety of the Roman world, opening himself up to new forms of sources that historians can use to view the Ancient world. Perhaps the most radical of studies of this period was Jones' *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, which attempted to catalogue a greater amount of knowledge about this period, albeit without much deep analysis.

which have increasingly expanded the source material to include art, architecture, song and sport. These “new” types of source material, more open to interpretation than the literary have often forced historians to adapt to the practices of cultural historians, opening the way for far broader studies of the Ancient world than had been previously conducted.

A number of problems with the historiography of this period began to emerge in the later half of the twentieth century, as historians began to change the way that they thought about and wrote about history. The historiographical paradigm of this period ignored too many institutions of the Roman Empire in favor of individuals: the Emperors. Too much historical agency was given to a small number of men, admittedly powerful, but not capable of changing the Roman world in the ways attributed to them. The actions and thoughts of these historical actors were not properly synchronized with the historical context in which they lived. The narrative provided by the Christian sources was not properly analyzed, nor criticized. The over-reliance of literary sources came at the cost of ignoring other forms of sources such as epigraphic and numismatic. The narrative of religious conflict was oversimplified: the paradigm assumed that paganism was in decline in the third century, and could only comprehend Diocletian as a true pagan, grasping at the failing authority of paganism. Finally, the teleology of Christianity's inevitable victory was questioned, shaking the very foundations upon which the paradigm was built.

I mentioned the 1980's before as the time when the historiography of this topic began to shift. A new generation of historians began to ask important questions about the traditional narrative, questions that opened the paradigm up to new interpretations. Historians such as TD

Barnes¹³ and Roger Rees¹⁴ have been leaders in this trend, working to open the ancient world up to the post-modern shift that any student of history can recognize. The problems with the historiography of the period were recognized, and steps were taken to overcome them. However, overturning the majority of established work on the ancient world has been quite difficult. The majority of new studies do attempt to add social or cultural history elements, yet are often unable to fully break from the paradigm of pagan Diocletian juxtaposed with Christian Constantine.

A trend that has proven highly influential on the historiography of the Ancient World is an increasing willingness to uproot the Christian narratives of the past. In terms of the study of Late Antiquity, the importance of this cannot be stressed enough. The narrative of this period was created largely upon an assumption of eventual Christian victory, a teleological belief that plagued both ancient writers and those who studied them. In western societies that are increasingly becoming “post-Christian”, there is little fear to overturn the traditional narrative of the Church’s history, and the result is a shift in history writing that has emphasized the relationships between the church and society in the past, rather than the Church’s mastery of said societies. The field of history no longer sees the Christians of the Ancient World as the primary historical actors, and instead have begun exploring church history and Ancient history through the lens of tension and interaction between a traditionally pagan world and an increasingly

¹³ TD Barnes. *Constantine and Eusebius*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981;. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

¹⁴ Roger Rees. “Images and Image: A Reexamination of Tetrarchic Iconography.” *Greece and Rome* 40, no. 2 (October, 1983): 181-200.

Christian society.¹⁵ Most importantly, historians such as those this study relies upon have begun to see the past in terms other than a spreading and inevitably victorious Christianity

Some difficulties are evident in studying the Tetrarchic period after this brief survey. To begin, this period is often studied only as a primer to studies of Constantine, the eventual victor that emerged after the Tetrarchy ended. Constantine is a favorite among historians, as evidenced by the sheer number of books that have been written of his life. Historians of Constantine, such as H.A. Drake¹⁶ and Barnes, often give only passing reference to Diocletian, devoting scant pages to Constantine's predecessor, while histories that span several centuries, such as Robert Grant and Pat Southern, generally have only presented the Tetrarchy as the period before Constantine came to power and the context in which his struggle to become emperor was placed. A historian is often forced to read through the studies of Constantine in order to gain insight on Diocletian and the Tetrarchy, as the majority of the works on Constantine focus on his actions as emperor, with only background leading up to his ascension. Today, historians have begun to re-examine this period, opening new avenues of research. Of the authors who do study the Tetrarchy, such as Roger Rees, Barnes, and Stephen Williams, importance is usually placed on Diocletian as the innovator and senior partner, in a way taking historical agency away from the other partners in the Tetrarchy.¹⁷ This is a particularly tricky situation for my study; Diocletian

¹⁵ Peter Brown has long been the leader in this field, contributing seminal works that change the paradigm of how we view the Ancient world, and he has been joined but others such as Barnes and Potter, who are not hesitant to question long-held beliefs

¹⁶ HA Drake. *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

¹⁷ Rees' *Diocletian and the Tetrarchy* is an example of this. The author assumes that Diocletian was the main agent of change in the Roman Empire, yet agrees that the Emperor was often pressured by his Tetrarchic partners, such as

was the senior partner, and it is easy to assume that the Tetrarchy ruled according to his design. The Dyarchy and then the Tetrarchy were formed because a single emperor found it impossible to be everywhere he was needed. In essence, each Tetrarch was given a regional responsibility, and it would be foolish to believe that the regions did not respond differently to the Tetrarch's actions. Diocletian may be the focus of this study, but it is necessary that we understand the other members of the Tetrarchy were not powerless bystanders, a fact that historians sometimes lose sight of.

The paradigm that has dominated the study of the Tetrarchy is weaker than ever, and a great deal of flux has been introduced into the historiography of the subject. The easiest way to understand the state of the questions being raised here are to examine some of the historical debates that have yet to be settled, specific to his thesis, and to juxtapose these in context with the paradigm that existed for so long as the dominant narrative. In terms of the subjects of this thesis, the three major innovations of Diocletian being examined are particularly open to debate; in the case of the imperial cognomen and the Price Edict of 301, there has been relatively little study, while the Persecution presents a different problem in that there has yet to be an alternative narrative to the paradigm presented.

The assumption of the names *Iovius* and *Herculius* by Diocletian has too long been ignored by historians as a topic for study. Since the assumption of a title and its meaning was not relevant to the questions that historians such as Gibbon and his contemporaries asked, they all

in the case of the Persecution. It is an unfortunate fact that we still do not have a clear understanding of the power structure of the Tetrarchy.

but ignore the topic. Later historians such as Frensdorff and Dodds¹⁸ make mention of the name change, using the evidence to support their argument of the Emperor's pagan piety. Working off an assumption that paganism was declining during the third century they posited that Diocletian attempted a "revival" of tradition through his actions without giving the topic the attention it deserves.¹⁹ Fortunately, further scholarship has broadened our understanding of the third century, and historians no longer fully support the concept of paganism in decline; Peter Brown long ago raised the possibility of surging pagan support during this period and places the Tetrarchs in the middle of this.²⁰ Unfortunately, to this point there has yet to be a sufficient study of the assumption of imperial cognomen by the Tetrarchs. The dominant historiography of Diocletian as a devout pagan during a time of decline for that lifestyle and religion has been seriously questioned by Brown and David Potter²¹, among others, yet the assumption that Diocletian and Maximian took their names due to their pagan piety endures today.²² This thesis will attempt to introduce an alternative answer as well as studying the importance and function of the emperor's name. We are left with the question of motive behind Diocletian's assumption of the

¹⁸ ER Dodds. *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965.

¹⁹ Harold Mattingly. "Jovius and Hercules." *The Harvard Theological Review* 45, no. 2 (April, 1952): 131-134.

²⁰ Peter Brown, "The Later Roman Empire". *The Economic History Review* 20, no. 2 (August 1967): 327-343.
While only touching upon the religious beliefs of the Tetrarchic emperors, Brown's arguments have opened a new genre of study for the ancient historian to examine questions of this period. His concepts of pagan revival and political power are incredibly relevant to this study

²¹ David Potter. *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

²² B. Leadbetter. "Best of Brothers: Fraternal Imagery in Panegyrics on Maximian Hercules." *Classical Philology* 99, no. 3 (July 2004): 257-266.

name *Iovius*. Did the emperor take the name because of his religion? Or is there a possibility that other factors motivated his name change?

The study of the Price Edict of 301 has seen more intense scrutiny than that of the Emperors' cognomen, and has seen considerably more debate. The debate has centered on the motive behind the Edict, its content, its success, as well as the economic knowledge of the Emperor who authored it. First, the motivations and logic behind the Edict have been questioned since the earliest histories written of the Edict. Beginning with Lactantius, who wrote of Diocletian's greed choking the economic health of the Empire²³, and continuing with this study, no historian has yet to adequately explain why Diocletian chose to issue the Edict on Maximum Prices, nor whether he expected the Edict to find success. There has been consensus that the Edict was issued in response to the pleas of Diocletian's soldiers, who had great access to the emperor, concerning the rising prices of goods in relation to their fixed pay. Since the army was Diocletian's main power base, which the Emperor needed to keep happy if he was to avoid the fate of so many of his predecessors, it has been inferred by some that the main impetus behind the Price Edict was to maintain a happy and satisfied military.²⁴ However, Stephen Williams has raised the possibility that the Price Edict was designed to protect procurers for the government from price gouging, an interesting departure from the consensus.²⁵

²³ Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* 7.1-12.

²⁴ The works of Grant and Jones suggest this, and Rees agrees, citing Diocletian's military background as evidence of his favoritism.

²⁵ Stephen Williams. *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*. New York: Methuen, 1985.

Another debate has centered around Diocletian's grasp of economic theory, and here we see much less consensus. Rees and Corcoran²⁶ are among the school that believe Diocletian believed in an economic reality that did not exist; other historians such as Barnes²⁷, Williams, and Potter are of the mind that Diocletian was simply out of his league, attempting to apply small scale economic policies to the Empire as a whole, believing they will work. Finally, Pat Southern believes that Diocletian was out of his mind, issuing an unreasonable and unenforceable edict²⁸. I will argue later that an amalgamation of these views may be likely, that Diocletian did try to apply small scale practices on a larger level; however, merely fixing prices was not the true aim of the Price Edict.

There has been a lack of debate concerning the success of the Edict. Almost universally, historians believe that the Edict was a failure, was never enforced nor even promulgated outside of Diocletian's area of influence.²⁹ Even though Diocletian was the senior *Augustus* in the Tetrarchy, his partners appear to have ignored the Price Edict, as a lack of archeological evidence has suggested. The Edict has also been assumed a failure due to a lack of evidence showing its enforcement in Roman law. Lactantius wrote that the Edict caused riots and great bloodshed, leading Diocletian to repeal it.³⁰ To this point there has been little evidence to

²⁶ Simon Corcoran. *The Empire of the Tetrarchs: Imperial Pronouncements and Government AD 284-324*. New York: Clarendon Press, 1996.

²⁷ Barnes, 1982.

²⁸ Pat Southern, *The Roman Empire From Severus to Constantine*. London: Routledge, 2001. 161.

²⁹ This argument is evident in nearly every article published when a new fragment of the Edict is found in another location, such as Mommsen, 1891, but also in all studies of the Edict that appear in histories of this period, such as Rees, Barnes, et. al.

³⁰ Lactantius, *DMP* 7.6.

contradict this. However, an argument from silence has lead historians to examine the Price Edict only in the locality of Diocletian's sphere of influence, and has lead to an unfortunate lack of analysis on the Edict's scope and intention. This interpretation has become another paradigm that this thesis will be addressing directly, arguing for a different interpretation and for more in depth studies of the Price Edict.

The study of the Great Persecution has seen also considerable attention since the fourth century. Much as for this period as a whole the main narrative has been Christian in nature, although some historians³¹ have stood out for their attempts to move away from the traditional interpretation of the Persecution: as a pagan attack against the supposedly impious Christian sect. New interpretations have begun to look at the various factors involved in motivating the Persecution.³² The traditional historical narrative for the Great Persecution has followed the Christian primary sources, Lactantius and Eusebius. Both authors claim that Diocletian was not always hostile towards the Christians, it was only when the prayers of several Christian attendants interrupted a sacred ritual did he order their removal. What follows is a tale with Galerius as the main antagonist: he supposedly sets his own "Reichstag Fire" in Diocletian's palace, forcing fear into the old man's mind, then bullies him into outright persecution and torture of Christians, which the primary sources would have you believe are a majority group in

³¹ First was Gibbon, who criticized the Christian sources for exaggerating the brutality of the Persecution, followed by GEM De St.Croix, who questioned the *Acta Martyrdom* and the creation of a cult of martyrs.

³² Gradel and Potter in particular have examined the religious conflict in terms of a division of loyalty amongst Roman citizens, an idea pioneered in Frennd's *Martyrdom and Persecution*.

the population of the Roman Empire.³³ The primary sources claim that sacrificial altars were set up as a sort of "litmus test" to out the Christians in the populace as a whole in order to condemn them to torture. Further, they claim that Constantius, the father of Constantine I did not allow the Christians in his part of the Empire to be tortured, which has been presented as proof of his affection for, and possible conversion to, Christianity.³⁴ Finally, these sources present the Christian population as stoic and heroic in the face of oppression, eventually wearing away the resolve of the pagan Romans.

This narrative existed unchanged from the time it was recorded in the contemporary Christian sources, through the shift in historiography evident in the 1980's, since historians often found it impossible to break away from the narrative of eventual Christian victory. The focus of studies shifted with the advent of new history, cultural and social history, but the narrative always remained the same: Diocletian, or rather Galerius via intimidating Diocletian, hated the Christians for their lack of piety towards the traditional pagan gods of Rome, and persecuted them for that reason. Noted historians such as WHC Frend³⁵ and ER Dodds³⁶ have made significant contributions to the study of the Persecution, but were unable to break from this mold; the same applies to Fergus Millar's extraordinary study of the role that the Emperor played in Roman society.³⁷ These scholars attempted to approach this topic from the perspectives of social

³³ Lactantius, *DMP* 10.6, 11.8.

³⁴ *VC* 1.13.1-3.

³⁵ WHC Frend. *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*.

³⁶ ER Dodds. *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965.

³⁷ Fergus Millar. *The Emperor in the Roman World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

or cultural studies, but they based their arguments on the narrative provided by the Christian primary sources without imagining other possibilities, particularly in terms of motive.

The state of the debate on the Great Persecution today is ripe for a new analysis. This topic has seen considerable revision in terms of examining the Persecution through new lenses such as social mobility, authority and power structures of the Empire, and cultural assimilation, yet the same narrative based off Christian writing from the fourth century remains to be challenged. The exception is the recent work of GEM De. St. Croix³⁸, which has provided a new interpretation of the actions of Christians within the pagan world in relation to Persecution and the creation of impetus for persecution. This thesis will attempt to suggest a new motivating factor for the Great Persecution that is divorced from the traditional narrative of pagan piety, as a means to reinvigorate debate on the traditional narrative, and to help overturn it in favor of a more complete understanding of the interactions amongst the religions of the ancient world.

After surveying the narrative of the period this thesis will be addressing, as well as how that narrative became a paradigm, what remains is to questions where this thesis will fall into the debates surveyed. To this point, there appear to be two methods of analyzing the Ancient world, two "camps" if you will. The first is concerned with narrative, and the second with structures. Historians can choose to craft a story, as was the case with paradigm that existed until recently, or attempt to look at the foundations of Roman society in order to better understand the subjects of that narrative. This thesis will attempt to bridge the gap between the two by examining the actions of one man, the emperor Diocletian, within the context of the structures he existed in,

³⁸ GEM De St. Croix. *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom and Orthodoxy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

while asking new questions about this time period. This thesis is a continuation in the evolution of the historiography on Late Antiquity in general, and the period of the Tetrarchy specifically.

My study of Diocletian and his small slice of Late Antiquity falls clearly in line with recent trends in historiography. Although I am looking at the actions of an emperor, I am doing so in order to examine a wider concept of the construction of authority in an entire society. This study is not meant to be simply a biographical analysis at the actions of Diocletian; rather it is an attempt to understand a society better through examining the assumption of Imperial cognomen, the Edict on Maximum Prices, and the Great Persecution,. The study of these three innovative actions will allow historians to better assess the Roman world of the Tetrarchy, in the period roughly 285 to 305, by understanding the motives and machinations of Diocletian, as well as to draw conclusions from the success or failures of these actions.

Diocletian's reforms have too often been analyzed as the culmination of years of careful planning and manipulation. There is one point that I wish to address throughout this thesis: that rather than characterizing Diocletian as a genius planner, always steps ahead of his contemporaries, historians should instead see him as an emperor who was able to react to diverse circumstances with a variety of innovations; some were successful, some were not, but they helped stabilize the Roman Empire and the position of the Emperor in Roman society. Above all, Diocletian seemed to look for solutions that solved multiple problems in one fell swoop, rather than a solution for each problem. This reasoning will bear out in considering the solutions Diocletian created to the three crises that are the subject of this thesis. I plan to analyze how each of Diocletian's innovations studied here can be seen as a response to a specific crisis or threat, and not the culmination of some master plan of the Emperor's. By removing the paradigm of

Diocletian as a plotter, and instead viewing him as an Emperor who was willing to step outside of precedent to achieve a solution, we can gain a greater understanding of how Diocletian extended the authority of the Emperor over a greater aspect of the Roman world. From here we can then extrapolate significant conclusions about the course of Western history.

Sources

I feel that an introduction to the sources cited in this thesis is in order. In order to form my argument, I have drawn from a variety of sources, including literary, epigraphic, numismatic, and artistic. Each type of source has value, but also limitation; I have attempted as best as possible to outline both the benefits and dangers of using each. For in-depth analysis of sources, I have deferred to other, more experienced scholars, and have merely capitalized on their work. In particular, the work of Barnes³⁹, Corcoran⁴⁰, and Rees⁴¹ have been useful in determining which inscriptions are applicable to the Tetrarchy. In the field of art, I have used Hannestad's interpretation of Tetrarchic art⁴² to interpret the Decennalia base, as well as Thayer's helpful webpage.⁴³ Finally, in terms of coinage, the works of Shotter⁴⁴ and West⁴⁵ have been very

³⁹ Barnes 1981; Barnes, 1982.

⁴⁰ Simon Corcoran, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs: Imperial Pronouncements and Government AD 284-324*. New York: Clarendon Press, 1996.

⁴¹ Roger Rees, *Diocletian and the Tetrarchy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.; Roger Rees, "The Emperors' New Names: Diocletian Jovius and Maximian Hercules" in *From Herakles to Hercules: Exploring a Graeco-Roman Divinity*. Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2005.

⁴² Niels Hannestad. *Roman Art and Imperial Policy*. Aarhus University Press, 1988.

⁴³ B. Thayer. <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/thayer/e/home.html>. accessed electronically Feb. 2009 through June 2012.

⁴⁴ David Shotter, "Gods, Emperors, and Coins." *Greece and Rome* 26, no. 1 (April, 1979): 48-57.

useful. For the construction of historical context, I have drawn from a wide range of sources as contained in my bibliography, with specific authors cited in text as applicable.

There are a number of problems a historian faces in studying the literary sources of the Tetrarchic period. Even though the period is one with better literary sources, the sources that historians have at their disposal are mainly from subsequent decades, and are predominantly Christian sources which show clear bias. Eusebius and Lactantius are by far the most referenced, and the historical validity of these two is still being debated today. As for pagan sources, such as Ammianus Marcellinus, Symmachus, and Eunapius, many of their works exist only through quotations, rebuttals, and references in Christian texts of later centuries. Even though the Tetrarchic period has had more written about it in surviving texts than earlier periods, these sources are often fragmentary or biased, and must be critically examined. A number of authors featured in my bibliography are helpful in this regard. T.D. Barnes' examination of the relationship between Constantine and his biographer, Eusebius of Caesarea allows me to deconstruct how and why Eusebius writes about the Tetrarchy. In a similar fashion, the *Panegyrici Latini*, edited and analyzed by C.E.V. Nixon and Saylor Rodgers, have proven an enormous boon to my research, as it will allow me to read translated imperial panegyric, a valuable source for studying imperial propaganda and authority alongside the authors' analysis and critique.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Luis C. West, "Imperial Publicity on Coins of the Roman Emperors." *The Classical Journal* 45, no. 1 (October, 1949): 19-26.

⁴⁶ Two panegyric, the *Panegyric of Maximian* and the *Genethliacus of Maximian* were integral to the formation of my first chapter, concerning the adoption of names by the Tetrarchs.

Even though the Tetrarchic period has better literary sources than earlier periods, these sources are often fragmentary or biased, and must be critically examined. The main literary sources used in this study are Lactantius, Orosius and Eusebius, from the Christian perspective, and the *Historia Augusta* and Aurelius Victor from the pagan perspective. Since I have no intention of a literary analysis of any of these sources, their usefulness will be limited to their role as primary sources of the topic. While I am aware of the limitations of each source, I believe that the ways in which each author approaches the topics of the Tetrarchy that I am examining here will work to shed light upon the subject. The main Christian sources available to historians are helpful in examining all three of the topics this thesis will focus on, but particularly that of the Great Persecution.. What sets the Persecution apart from other topics in this thesis is that the surviving source material is wholly Christian in origin; there are no surviving literary or epigraphic sources of the Persecution that do not come from a Christian perspective. Particularly troublesome is the fact that the Edicts from the Emperor that inspired the actions referred to as the Great Persecution do not survive in their original format, so historians must rely on Christian sources, most notably Lactantius' *De Mortibus Persecutorum* (*DMP*) and Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* (*VC*) and *Historia Ecclesiastica* (*HE*) in order to describe not only the actions of the persecutors, but their motive as well. This has caused the assumption of motive that many historians favor, that the persecutions against Christians was almost entirely religiously motivated.

The most popular Christian source used to describe the Great Persecution is Lactantius' *De Mortibus Persecutorum* (The Deaths of the Persecutors), a tract written after the ascension of Constantine I as emperor, and describes the persecutions that Christians had faced from the time

of Nero to that of the Tetrarchy, while also describing the pathetic or grisly deaths of those emperors who had persecuted the Christians. This work is useful in that it describes the Persecution from the perspective of one who lived through it, although using Lactantius as a source raises several issues. Above all, Lactantius, a noted Christian apologist, is writing with a purpose not very different from that of Christian apologies: pointing out the futility of persecuting Christians, and the untimely ends that persecution emperors come to. He also is writing with a eye to presenting the Christian population in a particular way: heroic Christian fortitude in the face of pagan oppression that eventually wears down the corrupt bureaucracy and causes the average pagan to decry the bloodshed required to subdue the Christians. The descriptions of death and torture that Lactantius presents the historian with do not always match other recorded sources of the period, such as the *Acta Martyrdom*, and may be fabrications or embellishments that later historians have not truly dismantled. Finally, and this will be addressed more in a study of the historiography of the Persecution, Lactantius is rather vehement about presenting the *Caesar* Galerius as the true author of the Persecution, excusing Diocletian as a frail old man who was overwhelmed by the incessant demands of his bloodthirsty subordinate. This concept has been seized upon by many historians, taking historical agency away from the head of the Tetrarchy. While *DMP* is valuable for being one of the few sources to describe the Persecution, many of the conclusions it supports are the subjects I will be attempting to reverse in this chapter.

The two works of Eusebius of Caesarea that historians turn to in order to study the Great Persecution are the biography of Constantine (*VC*) and the Church History (*HE*). The first does not describe the Persecution overmuch, but it is the source for the longstanding argument that

historians have used that Constantine's father, Constantius Chlorus, did not persecute as his Tetrarchic partners did. The veracity of this has not yet been defined, although it is quite possible that this is a later invention of Christian authors to support and compliment Constantine as a Christian emperor. The *Historia Ecclesiastica* is useful to historians, although just as with Lactantius, it raises several issues that I feel have not been significantly addressed in the study of the Great Persecution. Eusebius has been criticized roundly by many historians for his difficulties in chronologically placing events, although TD Barnes defends Eusebius' attempts at truthfulness.⁴⁷ The fact of the matter is, *HE* was written over a long period of time, may have been cannibalized from other authors, and was not written in the order it has been preserved in. Also, like Lactantius, the question must be asked, who is Eusebius writing for? *HE* is a history of the Christian Church, compiled during either Constantine's later years, or after his death. It was written for a Christian population living for the first time under a decidedly Pro-Christian emperor. *HE* was most likely intended as a catalogue of the tribulations that Christians had faced in order to get to this period of stability and peace; it was not intended as a history so much as a celebration.

A different type of literary source is Imperial panegyric, scripted vocal addresses to the emperor that have been preserved in literary form. These sources are invaluable at giving the historian a view into the imperial court, as these addresses were quasi-official, and contained what the author of the panegyric believed the emperor and advisors wanted to hear. However, the evidence presented must be taken with a grain of salt for exactly that same reason. For this study,

⁴⁷ Barnes, 1981.

two panegyric give us insight into the Tetrarchs' cognomen: the Panegyric of Maximian of 289, and the Genethliacus of Maximian in 291. The translation and analysis of Nixon and Rodgers was integral to allowing me to use this evidence in this thesis.⁴⁸

Moving beyond the literary, a great deal of information on the Tetrarchy can be extrapolated from the surviving archaeological evidence: inscriptions, coins, and buildings. The epigraphic evidence that I have collected for my arguments comes nearly exclusively from the *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (ILS), compiled from 1862 to 1916 by Hermann Dessau.⁴⁹ The inscriptions have been transcribed accurately, including capitalization and punctuation from the ILS. Where applicable, I have included the information about context of the inscriptions (location, conditions, etc.) that Dessau included in his text. While the ILS is by no means inclusive, I believe that the inscriptions found there can be representative of the period as a whole. The inscriptions are found in varied part of the empire, and include Rome, Gaul, the Greek provinces, and Egypt.

Unfortunately, epigraphic evidence from the time of the Tetrarchy is surprisingly sparse. Compared to other Roman Emperors, few of Diocletian's nor Maximian's buildings survive; the largest works, such as the baths of Diocletian, the Arch of Diocletian, or the arch of Galerius were altered, repurposed or destroyed by the tests of time. Even Diocletian's palace at Split, site of a grand, personal temple to Jupiter, has been transformed into a baptistery, with a large statue of John the Baptist added by later Christian residents. The majority of inscriptions available today from the Tetrarchic period are dedicatory, which, while useful, were highly stylized and

⁴⁸ CEV Nixon and Saylor Rodgers. *In Praise of the Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1944.

⁴⁹ See bibliography for complete citation.

formulaic, presenting certain problems in using them as evidence. Unlike other periods in Roman history, the imagery used by the Tetrarchs has not yet been satisfactorily examined; the meanings of inscriptions, titles, abbreviations and images still remain open to considerable debate. Roger Rees in particular has written a work calling for a reexamination of Tetrarchic imagery in order to formulate new ideas on the period.⁵⁰

While the epigraphic evidence for the chapters on the imperial cognomen and the Price Edict were quite helpful, there is no surviving evidence of the four Edicts against the Christians that does not lay within the pages of a Christian narrative. Unlike the Edict on Maximum Prices, which has been preserved in several cities throughout the Empire, the exact wording of the four Edicts do not survive. Because of this, historians only know that there were four separate Edicts and their respective effects, through the prism of Christian writing. This presents a great deal of difficulty in analyzing the Edicts against the Christians, and has been in large part the determining factor in the construction of the paradigm narrative on this subject.

The numismatic evidence of the Tetrarchy survives in great quantity. Its utility, however, may not be as great. Since one of Diocletian's main accomplishments was the reformation of Roman currency, there is a scarcity of local coinage that survives; the coinage that is available is almost exclusively from official Imperial mints. While these coins do give the historian evidence of the official message intended to be conveyed by the coinage, it leaves us with little context on the local level, nor evidence of discourse between local areas and the official mints. Often, the coins minted in local areas can give great insight into the populace's moods, attitudes, values, and desires. Unfortunately, Imperial mints do not convey such messages, so the examination of

⁵⁰ Rees, 1983.

such discourse is unavailable for this paper. However, since the question at hand is the motivation behind Imperial policy, studying how the official coinage portrayed that policy can be enlightening. The coins used for analysis in this paper come from a single source, the respected numismatic trading website WildWinds.com, although there is a plethora of coinage from both across the Empire and across Diocletian's reign, forming what I believe to be an adequate sample size for this thesis.

The non-literary sources available have contributed greatly to new debates on this topic. Since the evidence for Diocletian and Maximian's actions often is only available to the historian through such evidence, the expansion of the body of evidence necessarily changes the dominant paradigms. The predominant interpretations of epigraphic, artistic, and numismatic evidence are being reexamined among historians as new ideas and ways of examining history are evolving in our field today. Rees has been a leader in this field, as have Barnes, Brown, and Potter.

A final note on source material available to historians: the 20th and 21st Centuries have seen rising interest in archaeology and the Ancient world, and as a result, an explosion of new epigraphic, architectural, and archaeological evidence has given historians new source material to work with on a constant basis. Digs in Rome, on the Palatine hills and at sites such as Kaikana have provided new evidence and raised new questions to be answered. This new evidence not only opens new avenues of research, but forces historians to question and analyze some of the seminal works that have always been the bedrock of studies on the Ancient world. Gibbons' *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, once thought as the premier work on the history of the Roman Empire, has all but fallen from grace, and even authors that I have relied heavily upon, such as Frend, have had to endure new examinations of their conclusions. Other

historians have added to this debate by questioning Diocletian's motives for many of his innovations, as well as his personal religious beliefs, and the widely accepted theories of the power structure of the Tetrarchy itself.⁵¹ Some of these debates will be addressed again later in this thesis, as specific topics may require a more exacting explanation of the historiography on that subject.

⁵¹ Leadbetter, 2004.

CHAPTER ONE: PIETY OR PROPAGANDA? THE TETRARCHY'S *IOVIUS AND HERCULIUS.*

At some point in the later 280's, the current emperor of the Roman Empire, Diocletian, assumed the cognomen of "*Iovius*" as an addition to his already extensive list of titles. Historians have long agreed that this term and this emperor were equated to each other by the contemporaries of the time. However, to this point there has yet to be a considerable study given to the assumption of this name by Diocletian; for *Iovius* meant "of Jupiter" and was a very intriguing term to be used by an emperor, especially during this time period. Jupiter, as Rome's oldest god, was the source of all pagan Roman piety. Jupiter was also one of the oldest pagan gods, as well as the head of the Roman pantheon, and this was a time of exploring new divinities in the Roman Empire. So why exactly would an emperor take a name that identified his person with that of an old-fashioned deity? What exactly was the purpose in taking the name? And what did it mean, both to the Imperial court and the common Roman citizen? While these questions may prove difficult to answer, I will argue that the assumption of the cognomen *Iovius* by Diocletian, along with the assumption of the cognomen "*Herculius*" by Maximian, Diocletian's imperial partner, were a part of a vastly complicated reaction to several historical circumstances that not only threatened the gains made by Diocletian as Roman emperor, but proved to mark a changing Roman society; these names were not merely a mark of piety towards traditional Roman gods, nor a desire to brand the emperor a living god, the *dues et dominus* Lactantius bitterly hated. I will argue that the assumption of the cognomen can be most convincingly placed near the end of the year 286. This year has proven to be a watershed in the development of the Tetrarchy: Maximian was elevated to *Augustus*, Carausius committed treason and took Britain

with him, and the earliest references to the Tetrarchs' cognomen appear on coinage and in panegyric.

Historical Background

In order to better understand the motives behind the assumption of the cognomen by the Tetrarchs, it is necessary to review the context of their time period. Diocletian came to power as emperor in 284, after killing Aper, the uncle of the reigning emperor Numerian. Aper had been accused of murdering Numerian, so after Diocletian was elevated to the position of Augustus by the army, he executed Aper, then fought a long campaign against Carinus, Numerian's brother and Diocletian's main rival for the Purple. After 285, Diocletian was, for the time being, the only emperor in the Roman Empire. This incident, and the way that Diocletian came to power is important in understanding many of Diocletian's actions during his time of rule. He effectively ends a period of civil war in the Roman Empire that lasted nearly half a century. From the time of Alexander Severus' assassination in 235, the Empire saw nearly constant warfare among suitors for the Purple, and most importantly, *it was the army that crowned nearly every one of these short-lived emperors*. As the army had crowned Diocletian emperor, they could do the same with a usurper. Further, during this time the Empire suffered a series of defeats in invading barbarian tribes, lost territory in both the East and the West, and some Roman cities suffered from plague and economic decline. This period has long been referred to as the "Imperial Crisis" or "The Crisis of the Third Century", and consensus has held that contemporary Romans blamed the crisis on a loss of traditional Roman values and religion. For those historians that believe in a declining paganism at this time, the evidence dovetails nicely into the argument that Diocletian's

motivations were to restore these traditional values.⁵² Some have argued that Diocletian was attempting to stabilize an empire that had seen decades of war and political strife by identifying himself with the stable and successful Roman past, along with its traditional pagan gods⁵³. I believe it can be more convincingly argued that rather than a champion of “traditional” Roman values and religions, Diocletian was more interested in restoring the sanctity of the Imperial office from assassination and usurpation, along with gaining and keeping the loyalty and respect of the army. Diocletian, after all, was a career general, and would have known how the army felt about its role in the Empire.

Analysis

What is the evidence that we have available to suggest that the Tetrarchs assumed these names? Most is epigraphic, although some survives in literary form. However, the evidence that does survive does not give us a very complete picture of this practice used by Diocletian and Maximian. We know that in the literary sources, it is always Maximian that is referred to as Herculius. In Lactantius:

What was the character of his brother in empire, Maximian, called Herculius? Not unlike to that of Diocletian; and, indeed, to render their friendship so close and faithful as it was, there must have been in them a sameness of inclinations and purposes, a corresponding will and unanimity in judgment. Herein alone they were different, that Diocletian was more avaricious and less resolute, and that Maximian, with less avarice, had a bolder spirit, prone not to good, but to evil.⁵⁴

And according to Aurelius Victor:

⁵²Frend, 6.

⁵³ Fritz Heichelheim, *A History of the Roman People* . 2nd Ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2003.

⁵⁴ Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, 8.1.

As for characters, moreover, they were of this sort: Maximian, with the cognomen Herculus, was fierce by nature, burning with lust, stolid in his counsels, of rustic and Pannonian stock.⁵⁵

Orosius adds:

Meanwhile, Diocletian in the East and Maximianus Herculus in the West ordered churches to be laid waste. . .⁵⁶

In none of the literary sources does Diocletian appear referred to as Iovius or as Jupiter, though Maximian is consistently referred to as Hercules. This begs the interesting question of which emperor was the first to adopt the cognomen; however, that will have to be addressed later. The second question posed by the literary evidence is lack of such references in the all-important Edict on Maximum Prices of 301, the crown jewel of literary evidence from the Tetrarchic period.

The surviving literary evidence of Imperial panegyric gives us more evidence that the imagery of Jupiter and Hercules riddled the Tetrarchy. Panegyric is not a good source of context, due to its nature, but it can be useful to understand what forms and terms would be used to flatter emperors in its delivery. The two panegyrics that give the greatest evidence concerning the cognomen are the Panegyric of Maximian, delivered in 289 and the Genethliacus of Maximian delivered in 291. In these orations we see many instances of references to both Tetrarchs and their divine counterparts, scattered throughout the panegyric.

Hercules, that that hero, the first of your family and name. . .⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Aurelius Victor, *Epitome De Caesaribus*, 40.10.

⁵⁶ Paulus Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 322.

⁵⁷ "Panegyric of Maximian", 1.3, in Nixon and Rodgers *In Praise of the Later Roman Emperors*.

or shall I recount the divine origin of your family, which you have attested not only by your immortal deeds, but the name you have taken”.⁵⁸

with that same timely assistance as your Hercules once lent to your Jupiter. . .⁵⁹

Use, I beseech you, the cognomen of each of your emperors, since you are not compelled to make a choice. Now you may be called at the same time both Herculia and Iovia..⁶⁰

Since both panegyric are addressed to Maximian, it is difficult to ascertain some simple facts about the power relationships of the Tetrarchs from panegyric alone. These orations were intended to flatter Maximian, so the truth would have definitely been stretched. This is especially notable in the orator’s shifting blame from the failed invasion of Carausius’ Britain from Maximian to poor weather, to avoid embarrassing his host. So to attempt to analyze the balance of power through panegyric is impossible, valuable though it may be in this topic. Nonetheless, the imagery of Jupiter and Hercules that is used, and the way that the orator uses solely these forms to address the emperors, shows that the identity of Diocletian and Maximian as Iovius and Herculius was well recognized and accepted, at least as far as in the Imperial court.

Epigraphic evidence referring to the Tetrarchs by their cognomen is quite common, although it poses some questions that must also be addressed, mainly since the inscriptions tend to be dedicatory, and their function and language may mislead us. However, of the evidence that does exist, there seems to be a few common elements. In inscriptions where the cognomen appear, both emperors are normally present in the

⁵⁸ Pan. Max. 2.3

⁵⁹ Pan. Max. 4.2

⁶⁰ Pan. Max. 13.3.

inscription; inscriptions concerning a single emperor do not normally contain the cognomen. The inscriptions do follow a pattern of referring to the cognomen, then a shortened, more informal version of the imperial titlature. What this may suggest is that the cognomen were not necessarily an official part of the imperial title, but were recognized as acceptable references to the emperor. What we can surmise from this is that there was a common understanding at that time period of what exactly Iovius and Herculus meant. It is that understanding that we need to rediscover.

A dedication to the restoration for a portico in Rome reads

Genio Iovii Au. Iovia Porticu eius a fundamentis exultaque
Aelius Dionysius v.c. operandi faciundo.⁶¹
Genio Herculei Aug. Herculea Porticu eius a fundamentis exultaque
Aelius Dionysius v.c. operandi faciundo.⁶²

This is a dedication to the genius of the two emperors, Diocletian and Maximian, and names them as *Iovi* and *Herculi*. Another dedication reads

d. S. i. M. fautori imperii sui Iovii et Herculli religiosissimi Augusta et Caesares sacrarium restituerant.⁶³

And in Mitrovic (Sirmium) a salute to both emperors

I. o. m. et G. h. L. pro Salute dd. nn. Iovio et Herculio Augg. nn.⁶⁴

A number of other inscriptions exist that reference the emperors singly, or together by their cognomen, but two important inscriptions exist that I wish to set forth.

⁶¹ ILS 621.

⁶² ILS 622.

⁶³ ILS 659.

⁶⁴ ILS 623.

These may possibly be graffiti, since Dessau does not explain the exact location or condition of the inscription; if this were the case, it would further reinforce the argument that the emperors' cognomen were popularly used. They are found in a museum in Alexandria, apparently carved near the two altars of the emperors in question, and read

Iovii Auguste vincas!⁶⁵
Iovii Caesar vincas!⁶⁶

Translating the inscriptions could suggest a hint of irony, as they proclaim that the Augustus and Caesar known commonly as Iovii (Diocletian and Galerius) have “won” victory. If these two are graffiti, they could symbolize that the popular nicknames of the emperors were widely known, and that an audience reading the graffiti would have known exactly who the vandal was referring to. Examined in light of the violent crackdowns in rioting in Egypt following the reformation of the tax system at the end of the third century, this scrawled inscription injects emotion and meaning into the two short sentences.

The surviving coinage of the Tetrarchy can be used to argue that the adoption of the cognomen occurred in the later half of the 280's . Diocletian came to power in 284, defeated Carinus in 285, and the earliest dated coin issued by Diocletian that I have found in researching this topic dates to 285. For the first year of his reign, Diocletian's coinage resembles that of earlier rulers': his title on the obverse with portrait, while the reverse sides contain a plethora of Roman deities commonly found on coins. Providentia,

⁶⁵ ILS 8930.

⁶⁶ ILS 8931.

Laetitia, Mars and Sol all appear, as well as Jupiter and Hercules. However, we see a dramatic shift in Diocletian's coinage minted in 286 or after. With the elevation of Maximian to Augustus, his coinage began to appear, and both the obverses and reverses of imperial coinage began to conform to the Tetrarchy's assumption of cognomen. Obverses began to almost unilaterally reference Jupiter, and reverses pictured that god most often standing alongside Diocletian. The most common reverse was "Iovi Cons".⁶⁷ Coins also included many others such as "Iovi Aug",⁶⁸ "Iovi Tutatori",⁶⁹ and "Iovi Fulgeratori".⁷⁰ Most interestingly, in 289, we see the first coin bearing the obverse of "Iovi et Herculi Cons Aug".⁷¹

Remembering that all the coins presented here are from official Imperial mints, we can surmise that the messages appearing in these coins were at the very least sanctioned by the imperial government, if not actively promoted. From that I conclude that the shift in coinage is the most telling indicator of the assumption of cognomen, and that this can be placed somewhere in 286. This date is very important to pinpoint, since I argue that the events of 286, and not Diocletian's personal piety, were the driving force behind assuming the name *Iovius*.

⁶⁷ Appendix A, Coin 1.

⁶⁸ Appendix A, Coin 2.

⁶⁹ Appendix A, Coin 3.

⁷⁰ Appendix A, Coin 4.

⁷¹ Appendix A, Coin 5.

Examined in light of the historical context, how can the assumption of the cognomen by the Tetrarchs be viewed? It has been argued that the worship of Jupiter was quite popular in the armies⁷², and that loyalty to Jupiter meant loyalty to the army, and hence loyalty from the army.⁷³ Historians have also cited that at this time, two new legions were formed, and there were in some way “special” to Diocletian and Maximian.⁷⁴ These two legions were named the *Legio Iovio* and the *Legio Herculio*.⁷⁵ At this same time, Diocletian was rebuilding and reorganizing the formation of the Roman Army, including revising unit size, tactics, and the pay scale as well as financing the construction of forts in border areas that would revolutionize the way that the Roman Army conducted warfare. Several inscriptions support this. One, found in Egypt, is a dedicatory to the restoration of a military camp.

Iovii, Herculi, Victoriae imp. Caes. Gaius Aur. Val. Diocletianus Pius Felix , invic. Aug. Pont. Max., Germ. Max trib Pot. V cos. III p. p. procos. et imperator caesar Marcus Aur. Val. Maximianus Pius invic. Aug. Pont. Max., Germ. Max trib Pot. III cos. II p. p. procos invictissimi principes nn. totius orbis restitutores castra cohortis I. Aug. Praet Lusitanorbim providentia suae maeistatis extracta dedicaverunt.⁷⁶

One of the greatest critics of Diocletian, Lactantius, wrote that

and each of the four princes (the Tetrarchs) strove to maintain a much more considerable military force than any sole emperor had done in times past.⁷⁷

⁷² Williams, 204.

⁷³ AHM Jones. *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964. 363.

⁷⁴ Southern, 151.

⁷⁵ Williams, 97.

⁷⁶ ILS 617.

⁷⁷ Lactantius, *DMP* 7.2.

It was not so much the size of the army that Lactantius criticized, but the heavy taxes necessary to fund the army, and the lack of men to work in the fields because so many left to go join the army. From this evidence we can surmise not only that the burden of funding the army was heavy upon the population, but that joining the Roman army became something that was desirable; from this we can say that it is likely that Diocletian's reforms would have aimed at pleasing the army. So it can be posited that by taking the title *Iovius*, which has been shown to have had significant importance to the culture of the army, coupled with reforms meant to placate and improve the army's loyalty, Diocletian was able to cement his position as both emperor and head of the army, and that this safety was the ultimate goals of the reforms and the assumption of the title *Iovius*.

Again we return to 286 as a seminal year in the development of the Tetrarchy. It was late in 286 when Carausius, a trusted lieutenant of Maximian and Diocletian, was tasked with the defense of Gaul and Britain from raiding barbarian tribes. However, when word came to Maximian that Carausius was not properly tithing his spoils of war to the emperor, and was instead forming an army loyal to him, Maximian ordered Carausius executed. Unfortunately for Maximian, Carausius fled to Britain with his army, named himself emperor and began to fortify that island against invasion. Instead of challenging Diocletian or Maximian for rule of the empire, however, Carausius seemed intent on remaining in Britain, and attempted to promote peace between the three rulers. There is evidence that he sent many letters to Diocletian, attempting to converse with him as an equal, and Carausius even enacted many of Diocletian's reforms, particularly monetary. The best evidence so far available to show that Carausius was not

actively antagonistic towards the Tetrarchs is coinage. Carausius struck the coinage of Diocletian and Maximian, as well as his own unique coinage. More tellingly, there are coins struck in Britain by Carausius that show the three together as equals: three *Augustae* for the Roman Empire.⁷⁸ In addition, much of Carausius' coinage stressed PAX AUGGG⁷⁹ (Peace between three emperors), *pietas* (loyalty), and *felicitas* (good fortune). It is entirely believable that Carausius intended to set himself up as the third emperor in the Tetrarchic system, seeing how Maximian had been elevated to Augustus for his utility to Diocletian, and intended to make his position so unassailable that Diocletian would be forced to accept him as an equal as well.

This is how Carausius served as the second major threat to Diocletian's position as Roman Emperor, and how he played a role in the assumption of the cognomen *Iovius*. Diocletian seemed unwilling to accept the *détente* that Carausius had formed, and wanted the usurper crushed. Maximian attempted an invasion to oust Carausius from Britain, but it failed in 288 or 289, and the situation seemed a stalemate, with the political and military climate not fortuitous for a quick resolution. If this were the case, I believe that Diocletian fell back on another route to protect his and Maximian's office, as well as undermining Carausius' rule. The cognomen of the Tetrarchs became *Iovius* and *Herculius*: Jupiter and Hercules. There was no room, either in the Tetrarchy or in Roman mythology, for a third person in this relationship since the Earthly power structure mirrored that of the divine. To this point, I have seen no evidence that Carausius attempted to copy the Tetrarchs in their cognomen, and it seems that Diocletian may have gotten his point across: there was no place in the Tetrarchic system for Carausius. Carausius' response

⁷⁸ Appendix A, Coin 6.

⁷⁹ Appendix A, Coin 7.

seems to have been a strengthening of British nationalism, and propaganda supporting his rule in place of Rome. There have been studies that have shown that he struck coins with reverses such as *Restitutor Britanniae* and *Genius Britanniae* on the reverse.⁸⁰ If this were true, and Carausius seemed to be secure and fomenting treason in Britain, then Diocletian would have had to deal with the fallout. To the Romans, it would seem that Diocletian either approved of Carausius, because he had yet to crush him, or that he was too weak to defend his empire from crumbling. In these terms, I believe that by creating the mythological relationship of the Dyarchy, as the early Tetrarchy before the elevation of the Caesars is becoming known, then Diocletian would have been able to show that Carausius was not a part of the legitimate power structure, as well as passing responsibility to Maximian to handle the insurrection; through this, the emperor is protected and an ambitious subordinate is given a difficult task. It would seem to be a win-win situation for Diocletian: Maximian defeats Carausius for him, or is unable to do so, lessening his influence and popularity.

This brings us to what I believe is the final, most important reason that Diocletian assumed the cognomen of Iovius. However important placating the army and undermining the rule of Carausius may have been to Diocletian, I am certain it was not the main driving force behind the assumption of Iovius; Diocletian's military reforms may have been enough to gain the support of the army without resorting to creating a bond steeped in Roman culture and mythology, and the situation with Carausius would eventually play out in murder and deceit. As I have argued above, if Diocletian's main goal was to solidify his position as emperor, he needed to prevent rivals from gaining popularity, and forge an identity of authority that superseded that

⁸⁰ Guy de la Bedoyere, "Carausius and the Marks RSR and INPCDA". *Numismatic Chronicle* 158 (1998) 79-88.

of any potential rival for the Purple. Even though the rebellion of Carausius may have posed such a threat, I believe that a greater threat to Diocletian's position came from the man he elevated to be his partner: Maximianus Herculius.

As we have seen, Maximian was elevated to Augustus at some point in 286, partly to carry imperial authority in the campaigns against the Germanic peoples, but also to deal with Carausius' insurrection. Diocletian realized that the Empire had grown too large for any one Emperor to deal with problems personally, yet some situations required the *Augusti's* presence. Some historians have speculated that Diocletian merely wished to make Maximian his Caesar, but that Carausius' revolt forced his hand into making Maximian a full *Augustus*.⁸¹ Maximian was already a popular general, a close confidant of Diocletian, and quite popular with the population⁸² and as earlier Roman history has shown, these attributes could often make a man ambitious. As we have seen in the section concerning the literary evidence of the Tetrarchs, Maximian is the only emperor to be referred to as Herculius. Indeed, it seems that his name rarely appears without the cognomen attached. I believe it is entirely plausible that the nickname Hercules may have been attached to Maximian for some time, due to his record of success in battle, before he came west at the behest of Diocletian. His record of success against the Germanic peoples there would have been more than enough to solidify this identity not only with the locals, but with those authors such as Lactantius, Aurelius Victor, and Orosius who would later write of his exploits. What this means is that Maximian's cognomen possibly *preceded* the official assumption of *Iovius* and *Herculius* by the Tetrarchs, as earlier scholars have always seen

⁸¹ Rees 2005, 235.

⁸² Nixon and Rodgers, 110.

it. This poses some very complex issues and forces us to further question validity of the belief that the cognomen were tied solely to pagan religious beliefs, and not simply historical contexts.

If we can accept the possibility that Maximian was known as Hercules, officially or popularly, before 286 then the question is raised as to why and how Diocletian would assume the title Iovius, in response. Again, I believe that it can be tied back to Diocletian's attempts to solidify the imperial position more than to prove his pagan piety. Diocletian was posed with a problem: a general in command of a large army, quite popular, with a nickname in tow that was often attached to past Roman emperors. Shotter has illustrated the way that imagery of pagan deities was used as the weapon of the politician, and of particular significance is his claim that emperors traditionally associated themselves with Hercules in order to prove that they were worthy to lead the Empire.⁸³ Faced with this situation, I believe Diocletian fell back on popular mythology in order to construct an identity superior to that of Maximian, one that would allow his subordinate to continue to serve him, while also removing his ability to mount a direct challenge to Diocletian for the Purple.

In Roman mythology, Jupiter is equated with the identity of the Greek god Zeus. He is the head of the Roman pantheon, has a special relationship with the Roman people, and observes ultimate authority. Jupiter symbolizes firmness, victory and social order. He is also, like in Greek mythology, a full god and the father of Hercules, who is born of a mortal woman, and therefore a demi-god. Hercules has much the same identity in Roman culture as in Greek. He was a mortal man, although capable of great wonders. He stands for strength as well as madness; Hercules is most often pictured carrying a club and wearing the skin of the Nemean lion. The relationship

⁸³ Shotter, 49.

between Jupiter and Hercules, however, gives us great insight into how these two figures could have been utilized by the Tetrarchy. Jupiter is seen as the distant god, all present and omnipotent, but not necessarily interested in the affairs of men. He is a planner and a god who gives orders to others to be followed. Hercules, meanwhile, is much more accessible to the people. He is seen as the savior of the oppressed and had special significance to the Germanic people of Europe. In this we can see a recreation of the Tetrarchy's power structure. Diocletian is Jupiter: distant, but all-knowing, and he dispatches his earthly agent, Maximian/*Herculius* to achieve Herculean tasks in his stead.

Diocletian was more of an administrator than a general, though he had success when he took the field of battle. Maximian was quite successful in the battlefield, and this gained him great popularity with the army and the populace. Since the mythology was so well-known by the Roman people, the relationship the two emperors would have been apparent without the need of an explanation. If this situation is an accurate representation, then the assumption of the title Iovius by Diocletian would have accomplished a great deal: Maximian would still maintain his nickname, his super-human identity, and his popularity, while Diocletian would have elevated himself over Maximian, taken some credit for his successes, and created a divine power structure that would have forced Maximian not only to challenge Diocletian for the throne, but Rome's pantheon of gods in the event he attempted to seize power.. In essence, Maximian, so recently raised to the purple, would have been put in his place as still subservient to the more senior Diocletian, the holder of legitimate Earthly authority from the gods..

The evidence available in panegyric bears out this subtle conflict that existed between Diocletian and Maximian, or rather the pains taken to pretend such a conflict did not exist. For

all panegyric that survives from the period of the Tetrarchy emphasizes loyalty between emperors, whether they are represented as brothers, as father and son, as demi-gods, or as divine executors of heavenly will.

one might justifiably call you and your brother the founders of the Roman Empire, for you are, and it is almost the same thing, its restorers.⁸⁴

With what candor and friendly feeling did you report to his divinity all that you had done on behalf of these lands, when, coming together from opposite ends of the globe, you clasped invincible hands. How trusting and fraternal was that conference! . . . But neither did your military virtues discourage him from generosity nor did his wealth cause you to recoil from military endeavor.⁸⁵

The orators of panegyric knew what would and would not be received well in their addresses, so herein lies the strength of panegyric as a source: to be used to understand the dynamics of the imperial balance of power through understanding what emperors wanted to hear. And it is evident in the examination of Tetrarchic panegyric that the goal was to flatter the emperor, portray him as related to the divine, and stress that regardless of how awkward the situation may seem, the two emperors were brothers and unassailably loyal to each other. The divine flattery could be passed on as inconsequential, but the repeated attempts to portray the emperors as friends, not foes, force me to believe that there was a conflict, or fear of conflict, between the *Augustae* of the Tetrarchy.

Next, what is especially linked with the reverence for the immortal gods, with what great piety you honor each other! For what ages ever saw such harmony in the highest power? What full or twin brothers share an undivided inheritance so fairly as you share the Roman world?⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Pan. Max. 1.5

⁸⁵ Pan. Max. 9.1-3

⁸⁶ "Genethliacus of Maximian" 6.3, in Nixon and Rodgers.

For what is there to wonder at if, since this world can be filled with Jove, it can be filled as well with Hercules?⁸⁷

The surviving Porphyry statues of the Tetrarchs supports these claims of fraternity as well. The four rulers are represented as clasping each other with one arm, while the other arm grasps a sword and the countenances of the Tetrarchs seem to glare at external threats. The argument of fraternity fits into an explanation of the assumption of cognomen as a way to ensure such conflict never came to pass, and Diocletian remained secure upon his throne.

Conclusion

The preceding pages were an argument for the motives behind the assumption of divine cognomen by Diocletian and Maximian. Those sections explained several possibly related reasons that Diocletian and Maximian would wish to be known as Iovius and Herculus. What I'd like to take a moment to do now is explain *how* exactly the conditions of the late third century provided the ability for the emperors to assume these names. As has been discussed before, historians had assumed that the turbulent times of the third century had formed a paganism that was in decline, and this focus determined their assumptions about the Tetrarchs' cognomen. However, I believe that instead of a declining paganism at this time, the Roman world saw a dynamic religious and cultural shift that left many questioning not only the place of the emperor, but the relationships between Man, Emperor, and Gods. These dynamic relationships are what allowed the Tetrarchs to assume the cognomen Iovius and Herculus, and allowed them to make this simple name change accomplish a great many goals.

⁸⁷ Gen. Max. 14.4

To begin with the evolving Roman culture of the third century, the Roman world was changing a great deal during this time, and the Roman people were forced to change with it. This meant those disaffected would have longed for a return to traditional values, a theme strong in many pagan writings of this period that have survived.⁸⁸ Social structures were changing, and some stood to benefit from this while others lost. The relationships that men felt with their gods was an integral part of this change. The rise of mystery cults, Eastern cults, and the spread of Christianity forced many Romans to view beliefs different from that of their ancestors. Gradel has argued that there were periods of conservatism towards traditional pagan deities, but rather than being connected with the spread of Christianity, these periods were precluded by shifts towards monotheistic pagan gods, such as Sol Invictus or Mithra, promoted not by the populace but by Roman Emperors.⁸⁹ The opening of Roman religion to new deities and the changing social structure of the Empire that this helped to create were paramount to producing a population that was amenable to the assumption of cognomen by the emperors of the Tetrarchy.

Besides questioning the relationships between men and gods, the third century caused Romans to question not only the relationship they held to their emperors, but the relationships those emperors held with the divine. The Imperial cult had always been the main avenue of showing loyalty to the emperor for citizens throughout the Empire; Imperial deification had always been the most visible form of the imperial cult, and offerings to the genius of the emperor

⁸⁸ The theme that Rome had lost some sort of indelible value or morality had long been expressed by pagan writers during the Second Century; this helped to create the view of paganism in decline. However, the writings that do survive, such as *breviera* (short histories produced for popular consumption) and biography promote the viewpoint of only a minority of the Roman social strata, and weren't necessarily indicative that this view was widely held.

⁸⁹ Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002. 351.

the most visible way of securing loyalty from the populace⁹⁰. In the third century, the Tetrarchs sought to begin a new form of the imperial cult that was more amenable to the people of this time, but still strengthened loyalty to the emperor. However, under the Tetrarchs, even though the cognomen may suggest the divine status of the emperors, it wasn't quite deification, and, a new relationship was established between emperor and the gods. Because "-ius" as a suffix established a special relationship between two parties, Diocletian and Maximian were able to form a bond between their patron deities without being forced to assume the trappings of godhood. Previous historians had always seen pagan emperors from Aurelian assuming the mantle of *Deus et Dominus*. Frend concluded that Diocletian thought of himself as a god⁹¹, Turcan wrote that Diocletian would have believed that he himself was a god, because his reign was consecrated and protected by Jupiter, and that this connected Diocletian to the god's identity.⁹² Drake, again writing mainly on Constantine, adds that as *Dominus* increasingly became the standard form of address for the Emperor, emperors began to actually conceive of themselves as gods, or at least the earthly actors of the gods.⁹³ I argue that it is unfair for historians to judge the Tetrarchs' actions through the lens of earlier time periods in the Roman Empire; Whereas Commodus and Aurelian may have proclaimed themselves gods, the Tetrarchs

⁹⁰ Gradel 366.

⁹¹ Frend, 478.

⁹² Robert Turcan, Trans. Antonia Neville. *The Gods of Ancient Rome: Religion in Everyday Life from Archaic to Imperial Times*. New York : Routledge, 2000.

⁹³ HA Drake. *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

existed in a time period markedly different from these emperor, so their assumption of cognomen must not be equated with the living deification of previous emperors.

The forms of address used by the Tetrarchy suggested a different relationship that would have been evident to the people of the time. In panegyric the emperors are presented as the children of gods:

Jupiter, ruler of the heavens and Hercules, pacifier of the Earth, so in all most splendid exploits even those carried out under others, Diocletian makes the decisions and you carry them out.⁹⁴

Since we see that you do not toil, but imitate the gods who are your parents.⁹⁵

On coinage the Tetrarchs were never represented as gods, but as receiving items or favor from the gods, or claiming the gods as conservators of their reigns. Even in art, the Tetrarchs are joined by pagan gods, but are never represented as them.⁹⁶ Potter deduced that Imperial nomenclature was the main way for an emperor to proclaim his identity to his subjects, and that the titles he took were very important in creating the imperial identity.⁹⁷ If we accept this, we can see that by adding Iovius to his already extensive list of titles, Diocletian was creating an imperial identity that did not say he was Jove incarnate, but rather that he simply had a special relationship with Jupiter. Because this statement is expected of a pagan emperor, it would not have been a stretch for pagan Romans to accept the emperor's divine authority, unless Diocletian

⁹⁴ Pan. Max. 11.6

⁹⁵ Gen. Max. 3.7

⁹⁶ Appendix B, Figure 1.

⁹⁷ David Potter, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

actually claimed to be Jove himself. It stands to reason that other, secular, concerns were the motivating factors behind the assumption of the cognomen.

Here we return to the crux of the argument presented in this chapter. Diocletian assumed an addition to his already extensive list of titles that proclaimed his special relationship to Jupiter and provided him with a strong base of authority: that which had been given by the gods. An astute historian will recognize here the beginnings of rule by divine right, but is important to understand that this assumption of divine authority has its basis in a set of very real threats to Diocletian's rule as Emperor. Diocletian did not wish himself to be referred to as a god or heavenly offspring out of arrogance or pagan piety; it merely served his interests in protecting his rule and extending his authority over the Empire.

Diocletian's most important edicts, the Edict on Maximum Prices in 301, and the Edict against the Christians in 303 contain no trace of his title as *Iovius*, nor Maximian's title as *Herculius*. If Diocletian were truly a devout pagan, as has been argued, and he fancied himself a god, then his grandest proclamations would reference his heavenly background; but these do not. Both edicts reference only the Tetrarch's secular authority in their introductions. While there is no mention of *Iovius* or *Herculius*, the imperial titulature is rife with military successes such as *Persicus Maximus*, and *Germanicus Maximus*, as well as references to the Emperors' offices and successes.⁹⁸ If Diocletian truly thought himself a god, why would he not reference this in his edicts? It is my argument that he did not believe in his divinity, and instead his authority derived from a combination of his military successes, his imperial office, and a carefully constructed Imperial identity, which included the cognomen *Iovius*, but was not limited to it. In my opinion,

⁹⁸ ILS 642.

this defeats the argument that the Tetrarchs thought of themselves as gods, and forces us to encounter the motivations of the assumption of cognomen in a contextual sense, as this chapter has attempted to do.

It has been my intention to show that the assumption of the cognomen *Iovius* by Diocletian was a political response to a set of historical contexts and a series of challenges to his rule. If we accept my theory that Diocletian's main goal through the reforms of his reign was to stabilize the empire, consolidate the position of emperor, and protect himself against usurpation, then all his actions must be understood within this context. The assumption of a cognomen, to be added to his already impressive list of Imperial titlature, was made possible through the cultural and religious contexts of the late third century, and presented Diocletian with an elegant solution to a set of related problems that faced him, and were directly contrary to his goals stated above. The identity that Diocletian established through the assumption of *Iovius* allowed the emperor to gain support of the army, undermine the legitimacy of Carausius' rule in Britain, and create a mythological power structure that limited Maximian's ambition while still allowing him to be a capable ruler, commander, and subordinate. As with many of Diocletian's reforms, the cognomen can be seen not as the machinations of a genius planner, but the reactions of a clever emperor that allowed him flexibility by solving problems with unique solutions.

CHAPTER TWO: FROM CONTROLLING COINAGE TO COMMANDING PRICES.

Having seated himself securely on the throne by the mid 290's CE, Diocletian began to turn his gaze inward, at the myriad problems the Empire faced besides invading barbarian hordes. He began an aggressive campaign of expanding and updating the Imperial military, as well as rapidly changing the way that the Empire projected force and responded to threats from the exterior. Diocletian also sought to alleviate the economic crisis that the Empire had descended into during the dark days of the Crisis of the Third Century. Hyperinflation and a scarcity of goods had eroded nearly all confidence in the Roman coinage, and the resultant markets were unable to provide the food and goods that the citizenry required, nor the taxes that the Imperial government needed in order to pay the troops who had won peace for Rome at a heavy cost. As we explored in the previous chapter, Diocletian had a definite interest in keeping his troops happy, paid, and fed; he also required a higher tax burden of the Roman people if he was ever to create a new Empire that would not fall into the same Crisis he had just rescued his from.

Diocletian was faced with several economic crises, all requiring Imperial action to resolve: the coinage was debased to the point of being worthless; there were great tensions in the provinces that large numbers of troops were housed in due to military requisitioning and a lack of markets; the soldiers who Diocletian looked to as his base of power were becoming unhappy with their pay, or lack of it; finally, a lack of production had driven prices sky-high, with

inflation passing 20% during the last decade of the third century.⁹⁹ It is very important to note that Diocletian's military background was not as a combat general who won fame in battle; rather he had proven himself such a capable administrator that he won respect from the Roman military. It is this background we must remember when analyzing Diocletian's responses to these crises: he responded not as a general or as a philosopher, but as a military quartermaster, one who understands logical solutions to problems, and most importantly, expects logical solutions to always solve those problems. Understanding this mindset is key to understanding the impetus behind the Edict on Maximum Prices that Diocletian would issue in 301, as well as the failed measures that finally led the frustrated Emperor to declare that the death penalty was the punishment for those who defied his vision of the Roman economy.

The Crisis of the Third Century that produced Diocletian as emperor had also created an Empire with many problems. The way that Diocletian responded to these problems was as much about creating a new relationship between the Roman people and their Emperor as it was solving the problem. Diocletian was always looking for new ways to extend his authority further into the lives of the Roman people, not because he was a megalomaniac, but because he had envisioned a new Empire, one that worked in different ways, with an Emperor who was no longer First Citizen, but a representative of the Gods. Stephen Williams writes that there is a definitive link between times of economic destabilization and the changing of social norms.¹⁰⁰ This was certainly the case at the end of the third century, and it gave the Emperor the opportunity to extend his influence further than ever before into Roman lives. This chapter will discuss the

⁹⁹ Alfred Wassink. "Inflation and Financial Policy under the Roman Empire to the Price Edict of 301AD." *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 40, no. 4 (1991): 465-493.

¹⁰⁰ Williams, 115.

ways in which Diocletian attempted to legislate the Roman economy as he commanded, a marked departure from any traditional relationship between the Emperor and the Market that had existed in the Roman past.

Historical Background

It is important to understand some background information before diving into analyzing the Edict on Maximum Prices. The military situation along the empire's borders had been mostly resolved, freeing the Emperor to act on other crises. The economic situation Diocletian faced when he became Emperor was quite possibly the worst any Roman Emperor had ever had to deal with. Rising prices were to be expected in times of war, as production was interrupted, manpower was scarce, and confidence was low. Unfortunately for Diocletian, prices continued rising inexplicably after he had secured the Empire's safety. Studying the price of wheat, a staple of Roman diet, prices had risen nearly 7000% the going rate during the Antonine period, while the relative value of money had only risen to 1000%.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Williams, 126.

Table 1 Price Index and Inflation in the Roman Empire

Date	Emperor	Estimated Price Index (Denarii Reign Augustus=100)	Average Inflation per annum
27BCE-14CE	Augustus	100	0.7%
64CE	Nero	75-85	0.7%
200CE	Septimus Severus	200	0.7%
215CE	Caracalla	267	0.7%
250CE	Trajan	300	3.65%
274CE	Aurelian	700	3.65%
293CE	Diocletian	1400	3.65%
301CE	Diocletian	7000	22.9%

Price Index

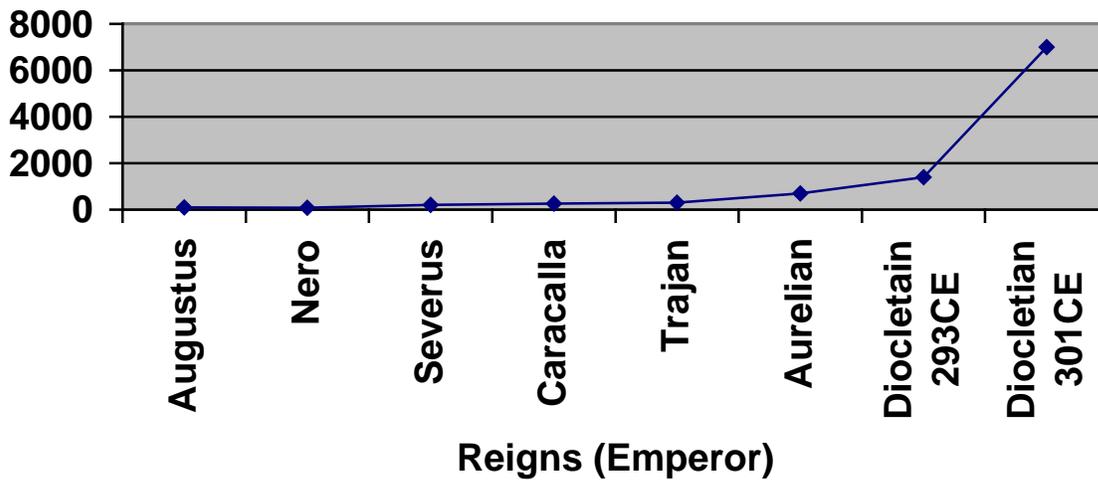


Figure 1 Price Index From Augustus to Diocletian¹⁰²

¹⁰² Information from Wassink, 1991.

What was particularly concerning for Diocletian was the sharp spike in inflation that occurred from the years 293 to 301, the period in which Diocletian was most active in re-tarriffing coinage and changing tax rates, as I will examine momentarily. While I am not suggesting that the Emperor understood advanced economic policy, the question here is of the perception that Diocletian held about the state of the economy that prompted him to act. Simon Corcoran has written that Roman emperors had an undeniable, but unrecognized, impact on the local economy wherever they were in residence, and this seems to be the case with Diocletian¹⁰³. When we combine this localized "Emperor Inflation" with another factor, the formation of the Price Edict becomes more logical. As I discussed in the first chapter, Diocletian had a special relationship with the soldiers of the Roman military. Whether he was naming crack units after his Imperial cognomen, or protecting active and retired soldiers from the use of torture¹⁰⁴, this emperor was one who knew where his power base lay. Soldiers indeed seemed to have an unusual amount of access to the Emperor, certainly more than normal citizens ever did.¹⁰⁵ What this suggests, and is certainly back up by an examination of the Edict's Preamble, is that soldiers are far over-represented in Diocletian's court, and their problems with wealth and the Market seemed to have been extrapolated across the Roman world as a whole by the Emperor. Added to this was the certainty that Diocletian was frustrated by the lack of success that his coinage and tax reform measures had enjoyed, coupled with his moral outrage that greedy merchants would dare take advantage of the brave soldiers who had defended their world, and the motivations

¹⁰³ Corcoran, 218.

¹⁰⁴ Codex Justinianus 9.41.8.

¹⁰⁵ Corcoran 218.

behind the Edict begin to coalesce. The Edict on Maximum Prices may have seemed to Diocletian a way to both placate his power base, and to finally stabilize the economic situation in the Roman Empire, all while allowing him to further extend the authority of the Emperor deeper into new areas.

Unfortunately, Diocletian may not have been as smart economically as he believed himself to be. It is debatable how complicated the Roman view of economics was, but it is most likely that at this period, Romans held no more advance economic principle beyond estate management.¹⁰⁶ His power base, the Army, was paid in base coinage, which made them especially susceptible to inflation¹⁰⁷, and Diocletian often tried to apply a simple quartermaster's viewpoint to an infinitely more complicated process.¹⁰⁸ While Diocletian always sought to introduce innovations that included features of universality and rationality, those ideals cannot always be applied to economic theory. The efforts by Diocletian towards reworking Roman law in the 290's that would eventually lead to the Justinianic and Theodosian Codes showed that he was disposed towards simple solutions that were fair and workable¹⁰⁹, which was commendable, but Diocletian also had a habit of commanding problems to cease; in the case of nearly a century of economic crisis, this could simply not be the case.

As mentioned before, Diocletian had taken some measures during the 290's to help move the economy towards its historical norm. He changed the Empire's coinage and values, and

¹⁰⁶ Williams, 127.

¹⁰⁷ Corcoran, 211.

¹⁰⁸ Williams, 118.

¹⁰⁹ David Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*. New York : Routledge, 2004. 295.

radically revolutionized the system of taxation that had failed to prepare the Empire fiscally for war, which was a cause of the present economic situation. To begin with the changes made to Roman coinage, I alluded in the last chapter that Diocletian had shut down many of the local mints who were responsible for creating coinage in their provinces, and had replaced them with fewer centralized locations, easier to control the message and quality of the coinage that was being issued. This was just one step that Diocletian had to take in order to try and reverse nearly a century of fiscal mismanagement by previous emperors. By the 280's , Roman coinage was practically worthless. The relative value of money was nonexistent and the quality of the coinage was below sub-par.¹¹⁰ Previous Emperors had paid for their wars by debasing the currency in secret, while threatening the death penalty for those who did the same without the Emperor's knowledge; this is one of the reasons the threat of Carausius' high quality coins explored in Chapter 1 was so dangerous to Diocletian.¹¹¹ Diocletian inherited an Empire with both high inflation and zero confidence in their money; but the Emperor had a plan, as he always did.

The first thing Diocletian did was to introduce a high quality gold piece, the *aureus*, in 286, used only for military pay. After reorganizing the mints in 294, Diocletian publicly increased the silver content in all coinage, hoping to restore confidence in the existing denominations.¹¹² He also replaced all of the provincial copper coins with a single *follis*, which had its value fixed against gold and silver and was intended to be the coin used by all for

¹¹⁰ Rees 2004, 40.

¹¹¹ Williams, 117.

¹¹² Barnes 1981, 10.

everyday purchases.¹¹³ The purpose of these acts was to restore the traditional three metal system of Roman coinage to prepare the way for values to stabilize.¹¹⁴ Unfortunately, by the turn of the century, these efforts were not successful, which lead Diocletian to try to command coin values to be set at levels he chose, with the Currency Decree of 301.

Not much is known about the Decree, but it is almost certain that the Decree and the Price Edict, issued so near each other, are intricately related, if not parts of the same policy. The Decree in essence commanded the values of Roman coinage be set at the levels that Diocletian chose, doubling the value of silver and bronze coinage.¹¹⁵ Herein lays the crux of why Diocletian's economic policies were unsuccessful. Diocletian seemed unaware that the value of money is not fixed to the value of the metal that makes up the coin. Rather, it is the confidence in the coinage and the supply of coins available that determines the value of money.¹¹⁶ Diocletian strove to increase the value of each coin individually, but he did nothing to remove the vast numbers of inferior coins still in circulation. The result was that the higher quality coins were hoarded and removed from circulation and the same worthless coins were still used to pay for items. Some historians have claimed that Roman mines were becoming exhausted by this time, meaning Diocletian would have found it impossible to continue issuing high quality coinage, policy or not.¹¹⁷ Diocletian's mistake here was the same we will encounter in studying the Edict

¹¹³ Williams, 117.

¹¹⁴ Southern, 160.

¹¹⁵ Barnes, 10.

¹¹⁶ Williams, 127.

¹¹⁷ H. Michell, "The Edict of Diocletian: A Study of Price Fixing in the Roman Empire." *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 13, no. 1 (February, 1947) 10.

on Maximum Prices: he believed that he could simply command the value of coinage be set, and did not seem to understand why this did not work.

Aside from problems facing the Empire's money supply, the Roman taxation system was ill prepared for financing wars, as it was not necessary through the early centuries of the Empire. Wars were paid for through military appropriations and the booty of victories.¹¹⁸ However, the wars of the third century were not wars of conquest that brought riches back to the Empire; they were desperate struggles for survival against foes that often were poorer, even if more numerous, than the Romans. Coupled with this was the lagging production of foodstuffs and goods caused by the turmoil of the Crisis of the Third Century, and it was plain to Diocletian that a new system was needed, one that could provide the Empire with the supplies that were needed to defend and rebuild, without the luxury of relying on money as a form of payment. Diocletian needed a form of universal currency that Romans could pay their taxes with, and it could not be the worthless coinage that was out there. Herein lies one of Diocletian's most important and overlooked innovations: the creation of the *annona* and the formation of the very first governmental budget in Western history.¹¹⁹ Through this we again see ways in which the Emperor used innovative solutions to both solve the Empire's problems and extend his authority to command the Roman people.

Diocletian's vision of a new Roman Empire included a tax system that was both fair and universal, but also allowed him to determine exactly how much he could squeeze in taxes without beggaring his people. The Emperor undertook a series of surveys that were far more

¹¹⁸ Williams, 116.

¹¹⁹ Rees, 39.

detailed than any in the past, counting every single bit of property of value in the Empire, and calculating the worth of every individual.¹²⁰ Again this was not undertaken so that Diocletian could gilt himself while his people starved, but rather so that the Emperor could more accurately determine what each citizen's **fair** contribution to the Empire was. To this end, Diocletian instituted a combined poll and property tax, which made tax evasion much more difficult and resulted in riots in Egypt.¹²¹ He also did away in 298 with the traditional tax exemption that Italy had enjoyed, earning him the eternal enmity of Roman historians.¹²² The *Constitutio Antonina* of 212 gave Diocletian the authority to do this, as citizenship was extended to all Roman free men; this meant more for increasing the taxable population than extending citizenship. As we will see in chapter 3, Diocletian also believed the *Constitutio Antonina* extended responsibilities to Roman citizens beyond taxation.

Having increased his tax base and having determined more fairly the tax burden of all Roman citizens, Diocletian was still faced with a quandary. The government, mostly the military apparatus but including the expanding bureaucracy that Diocletian's reforms created, required vast amounts of food and material which were not always available for purchase. As stated earlier, forced requisitions had created a great deal of tension between the Army and the Romans they were protecting, not to mention the fact that this grated upon the morality of Diocletian. Regardless, the taxes had to be collected in some way, and money was no longer a viable method of payment. Ever the innovator, Diocletian imagined a system whereby the citizens of the

¹²⁰ Williams, 120.

¹²¹ Rees, 38.

¹²² Aurelius Victor, *Epitome De Caesaribus*, 39.31.

Empire could pay their tax burden in whatever form they were most able to. This required a list of everything that the State would need, published every year in the form of an *Indictio*.¹²³ This *Indictio* would in essence become the Roman government's budget for the year, and is probably one of the single most important innovations to come from Diocletian's reign. By allowing his subjects to a fair and equitable tax, in whatever goods they were able to, Diocletian was able to finance his military and remake the Roman tax system to be far more universal and rational. From a system where the government had the choice of worthless money or nothing as tax revenue, Diocletian transformed the Roman tax system into a revenue generating machine the likes the Ancient world had never seen. Even if Lactantius claimed the system was evil and the taxes ruinous¹²⁴, the result was that money flowed into the coffers of the Tetrarchy, enough to fund the military and allow the Tetrarchs to go on a massive building and renovating spree their third century predecessors would never have believed.¹²⁵ Despite all this, however, at the turn of the century prices had still not fallen. The government had enough goods to supply and pay their troops, but those troops could not afford goods at market. To Diocletian, there could be no other answer to the question of why his genius policies were not working than to believe some force was working against him, defying his authority as Emperor.

In order to command his Empire, Diocletian often resorted to issuing *Edicta* that would be disseminated outward from the Imperial capital. Unlike previous emperors, the Tetrarchs issued far more *Edicta* than ever before, showing a willingness to legislate from the center and to

¹²³ Williams, 122.

¹²⁴ Lactantius, *DMP*, 7.4-6.

¹²⁵ Williams, 125.

apply their laws and commands universally.¹²⁶ The Price Edict we will now examine was no different. Although emperors in the past had often resorted to fixing the prices of various essential commodities, like wine and wheat, in times of crisis, the Edict on Maximum Prices of 301 was developed on a far larger and more permanent scale than any of these precedents.¹²⁷ Diocletian had no trouble, however, pointing to the precedents that previous emperors had set when composing the Preamble to the Edict, perhaps believing that the successes of price controls in the short term historically could be applied in the long term to stabilize the Roman economy.¹²⁸ I believe that it is important for us to consider Williams' assertion that both price controls and *Edicta* represent a baser, more "brutal" form of interaction between Emperor and subject as we consider the Preamble to the Edict on Maximum Prices.¹²⁹

The Preamble to the Price Edict is more important to this scholar than the schedule of prices and wages contained after. Though the latter are very important in that they can allow us to view what an idealized Roman economy may have appeared like to Diocletian at the turn of the in the early fourth century, the study of the extension of Imperial authority takes us into the justifications used by the emperor in enacting such a far-reaching and intrusive law. I will be liberally quoting from the Preamble as well as giving insight and analysis, but first, some more background on *Edicta* and the Tetrarchy.

¹²⁶ Millar, 257

¹²⁷ Corcoran, 213.

¹²⁸ Potter 2004, 335.

¹²⁹ Williams, 115.

Edicta were pronouncements from the Emperor(s) telling Romans important things that the Emperor felt they should know.¹³⁰ *Edicta* were also far more important tools of imperial policy than Imperial letters, since they were designed to be applied to the Empire as a whole, and not merely specific answers to a petition¹³¹. They were integral to the formation of an Imperial identity, as they portrayed to the citizens as a whole which titles and acts the Emperors felt best portrayed them for the purpose of the Edict. This in part explains the vastly expanded Imperial titlature of the Tetrarchy, in combination with the Tetrarchs increased use of *Edicta*. Particularly important in Diocletian's case were the references to the Emperor as the "Father" of the Roman Empire, a title used sparingly in the past and only referring to leaders who had changed or altered the history of Rome in some great way, i.e. Romulus, Julius Caesar, etc.¹³² As we saw in Chapter one, Diocletian had a vested interest in portraying himself not only as the agent of a God, but as the parent of the Empire who had its best interests at heart.

Adding to the construction of an Imperial identity, *Edicta* were often composed by the Emperor's own hand, using his own skills as an author and sealed with his signet ring.¹³³ The purpose of this was so that the Emperor could show off his superior culture and learning in philosophy, again adding not only to his identity, but to his memory. The *Edicta* of Roman Emperors were meant to be laws that lasted beyond the life of the issuing Emperor; once an Edict was on the Roman law books, it took another Edict from a later Emperor to cancel its

¹³⁰ Potter 1994, 110.

¹³¹ Potter , 112.

¹³² Sarlota Takacs. *The Creation of Authority in Ancient Rome and Byzantium*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 88.

¹³³ Millar, 253-4.

provisions.¹³⁴ This links the making of laws to the creation of the *memoria* of an Emperor, the memory of the man that would live on after his death. But Diocletian was not merely interested in being deified after he passed; he was far more concerned with creating the precedent for an expanded Imperial authority that would allow him far more control over the Roman people than any other Emperor. This expanded authority is what later becomes the rule by Divine Right of the Medieval Age.

Analysis

Two main points of contention will arise in this chapter between my argument and the primary view held by the majority of historians. The first concerns the promulgation of the Edict, and the second, closely linked, is of the success of the Edict. Historians have always pointed to the lack of epigraphic evidence of the Edict found in the West as proof that the Edict was never enforced outside of Diocletian's zone of influence in the Tetrarchy, and of the failure of the Edict in general across the Empire. Using this lack of evidence as an argument, I feel that historians have done a disservice to the study of the Edict. New archaeological evidence is always being unearthed, making an argument from silence speculative. Also, as we will see in the case of the Persecution of Christians, political and personal divisions in the Tetrarchy often came in the way of applying Edicts and laws universally, which does not necessarily mean that the Price Edict failed of its own merits, but that it may have simply been a casualty of Imperial politics. This common view of the Edict's failure is one that appears across nearly all boundaries in histories of the Tetrarchy. While I am not arguing that the economic evidence shows the Price Edict failed to lower prices, I do believe that the true aim of the Edict lies elsewhere, and that to simply write it

¹³⁴ Millar, 254.

off as a failure leaves historians short of understanding the dynamics of this period in Roman history.

The Preamble for the Edict on Maximum Prices is a masterpiece of political writing. To Romans schooled in the arts of debate and rhetoric, the emotional language and pejorative terms used by Diocletian would have been shocking, while his carefully constructed argument for the justification of his actions would have been hard to argue with. The Preamble for the Edict was written in an "Asian" style, using language that was highly emotive and featuring extensive repetition to fix an idea in the mind of the reader.¹³⁵ The emperor is presented as the Father of the State, and his quality virtues are juxtaposed against those of the greedy merchants whom Diocletian had decided are the cause of all the economic troubles.¹³⁶ The term "avarice" appears in the Preamble at least eight times, always referring to those who do not follow natural limits. Finally, the genius of the Preamble is that Diocletian claims he does not want to issue this Edict at all! In the tried and true method of politicians, Diocletian builds an admirable case to show that he was not ignoring or exacerbating problems, he was hoping they would settle naturally without requiring his attention. Alas! they have not done so, and now the stern parent of the Roman Empire must act, using precedent from the past to extend the Emperor's authority permanently into an area it had lacked control before, but only because of the greedy men who do not understand natural limits and duty to the State.

2. To be sure, if any spirit of self-restraint were holding in check those practices by which the raging and boundless avarice is inflamed, an avarice which, without regard for the human race, not

¹³⁵ Corcoran, 207.

¹³⁶ Corcoran, 209.

yearly or monthly or daily only, but almost every hour and even every moment, hastens toward its own development and increase. . . ¹³⁷

This boundless avarice has shown no willingness to check itself and has far outpaced normal or acceptable levels of profit. The concept of normal profiteering is not lost on Diocletian, the former quartermaster; however he believes there is a natural limit to profit, the concept of "Just Price" that is a main driving force behind the Price Edict. The concept of Just Price being "Natural", and that to violate this "Natural" limit is inhuman is an interesting feature of this edict and of economic policies in the Ancient and Medieval world. Diocletian's policies have always appeared to be based upon fairness to all, but also a shared common burden and duty to the State. The violation of this common duty, and attempts to make it harder for others to meet their own obligation could be construed as treason, a possibility why the punishment for violating the Edict is so severe. ¹³⁸

3. . . and since those whom extreme poverty has brought to a perception of their most wretched condition cannot further keep their eyes shut; it suits us, who are the watchful parents of the whole human race, that justice step in as an arbiter in the case, in order that the long-hoped-for result, which humanity could not achieve by itself, may, by the remedies which our fore-thought suggests, be contributed toward the general alleviation of all.

5. Therefore we proceed promptly to apply the remedies long demanded by the necessity of the case, and that too, feeling no concern about complaints that our corrective interference may, as coming unseasonably or unnecessarily. . .

This is the crux of Diocletian's attempts to justify his actions in interfering with prices in the market. He presents that the Emperor has not been blind to the suffering of the Roman people, particularly those who do not have wealth, but has stayed his hand, hoping that Nature

¹³⁷ Appendix C

¹³⁸ Rees, 42.

will take over and things will return to normal. When they do not, and a sense of injustice pervades the situation, the Emperor, who is more than human, steps in to right things as mere people could not. By presenting himself as unwilling to act, Diocletian maintains his agency as the representative of the Gods, but also distances himself from blame for creating the situation he must now fix. He has stood by too long out of respect that some may feel he overstepped his bounds, but the situation has become so intolerable that he must act!

9. But now, further, we must set forth the reasons themselves, whose urgency has at last compelled us to discard our too long protracted patience, in order that-although an avarice which runs riot through the whole world can with difficulty be laid bare by a specific proof, or rather fact-none the less the nature of our remedy may be known to be more just, when utterly lawless men shall be forced to recognize, under a definite name and description, the unbridled lusts of their minds.

The men who Diocletian refers to here may have been under the assumption that he was unaware of their transgressions, but he wants them to know that he has recognized their actions, and the reasons for them, but has stayed his hand from action due to other circumstances. It is important to note the language used here by Diocletian, highly pejorative towards those he is blaming, but also accepting that they are Romans. Unlike the Letter on the Manichees, which would be issued the next year by Diocletian, the enemy here were not outsiders seeking the destruction of Rome. These were the people of Rome who would bring about her ruin.

10. Who therefore can be ignorant that an audacity that plots against the good of society is presenting itself with a spirit of profiteering, wherever the general welfare requires our armies to be directed, not only in villages and towns, but along every highway? That it forces up the prices of commodities not four-fold or eightfold, but to such a degree that human language can-not find words to set a proper evaluation upon their action? Finally, that sometimes by the outlay upon a single article the soldier is robbed both of his bounty and of his pay, and that the entire contributions of the whole world for maintaining the armies accrue to the detestable gains of plunderers, so that our soldiers seem to yield the entire fruit of their military career, and the labors of their entire term of service, to these profiteers in every-thing, in order that the pillagers of the commonwealth may from day to day carry off all that they resolve to have?

This is one of the more important paragraphs, whereupon Diocletian sets out the true victims of the avaricious merchants: the soldiers, many of whom have sacrificed to defend the Empire from its enemies during the turbulent third century, only to see their pay, meager as it is, go to unscrupulous businessmen who inflate prices for their own gain. By referring to soldiers themselves, rather than Imperial procurators, Diocletian hopes to maintain the legitimacy and necessity of his actions here, as it would be difficult to believe anything other than an atmosphere of respect and thanks for the soldiers who had defended the Empire through the wars to defend Roman borders and pacify the Empire. The truth is, however, it was less likely complaints from the common soldier that Diocletian heard so stridently, but from his own Army quartermasters. While Diocletian certainly had sympathy for soldiers, and may have even heard some first-hand accounts of men being swindled of their entire paycheck, it was more likely the Emperor, always so quick to involve himself in the day to day operations of his armies may have been more incensed how much money was leaving his coffers to supply the Army, rather than how much was leaving the wallets of individuals.

11. Being justly and duly moved by all these considerations above included, since already humanity itself seemed to be praying for release, we resolved, not that the prices of commodities should be fixed-. . .

Again, more brilliant posturing. All of humanity is asking, begging, for the Emperor to act, and he will. Diocletian will not fix the prices of goods, which even he must understand is unworkable, not to mention may cause outcry over his intervention. Instead, he proposes...

12. It is our pleasure, therefore, that those prices, which the concise items of the following list indicate, be held in attention throughout our whole domain, in such a way that all men understand that freedom to exceed them is removed; while at the same time, in those places where goods manifestly abound, the happy condition of cheap prices shall not thereby be hampered-and ample provision is made for cheapness, if avarice is limited and curbed.

... that the maximum price allowed to be charged for a good to be set, and not to be exceeded. Diocletian provides that this is not fixing set prices, since in some areas the price of goods will not meet the maximum he has set. If a merchant chooses to charge less than the maximum allowed, that is his choice. He will not, however, be allowed to charge more than the maximum as decreed. The last line seems a warning shot across the bow of those Diocletian is addressing. They must address their own avarice and greed, or further acts may be required of the Emperor. The result will not be happy for them.

14 . . . -it is our pleasure that if anyone have acted with boldness against the letter of this statute, he shall be subjected to capital punishment.

The final shock of the Edict. Capital punishment had heretofore been reserved for cases of the utmost peril to the Roman State as a whole. Treason, sleeping on watch, causing a fire, the rape of a Vestal Virgin were all acts that could be seen to bring ruin upon the Empire as a whole. With this one line, Diocletian establishes that whoever acts against his will is guilty of the same charge of risking the safety of all. This is a giant step forward in terms of punishing those who defy the Emperor's authority, not to mention an extension of that authority in itself. Here we can see the makings of what will be discussed in Chapter three, when another group defies the Emperor's will.

Establishing the Preamble as the true heart of the Price Edict, where Diocletian lays out the justifications for his actions, does not mean that the rest of the Edict is worthless. Diocletian uses the economic situation as a pretext to extend his power into the economic sector, but establishing price controls that were arbitrary or ridiculous would have defeated the purpose,

creating an un-enforceable edict. Regardless of the historiography of the application and enforcement of the Price Edict, the evidence shows that Diocletian fully intended that its provisions be enforced. What we are left with is an invaluable insight into early fourth century Roman economics. The exhaustive schedule of Prices that appears in the Edict gives us a view into what an idealized Roman economy and wage structure would have looked like to the Emperor, and the logical and rational way in which the schedule was constructed is more than enough to prove that the Edict on Maximum Prices was not an empty gesture; rather it was intended to fix the problems Diocletian envisioned plaguing the Roman economy, in a manner successful enough to allow his intervention to continue and become an accepted part of Imperial authority.

What were the goods and methods of employment that appeared in the Price Edict, and why were these chosen? The answer to these questions may help us unlock the true motivations behind the Edict. The list of goods is exhaustive, although not all-inclusive. The same holds true of the wage scale included in the Edict. However, it is easy to entertain the thought that the Edict created an idea of a comparative market, whereupon any good or service not specifically listed in the Edict could have been easily compared to a similar field in order to determine its price or wage. Likewise for terms of trading, the maximum price set may have allowed for easier bartering in areas where the coinage had become completely worthless by this time. The basis of the prices included and the wages listed do follow logical patterns, although they do not make any allowances for supply and demand or price fluctuations, again proving the Emperor's lack of

understanding on higher order economic principles.¹³⁹ Indeed there is a chance that the maximum prices set for many goods may have actually been far too high, an irony that may have been lost on Diocletian.¹⁴⁰ As to the types of goods and services included in the Edict, there has been some debate among historians. I feel that the goods and services listed in the Edict were chosen for a specific purpose, but may have been influenced by the location of the Emperor when drafting the Edict. Since the Edict was first published in Antioch, Diocletian was obviously residing there at the time¹⁴¹. Antioch was no small, backwater Roman city; it was one of the central economic hubs for the entire Empire, and this would have meant that the goods available in the marketplace of Antioch would influence those contained in the schedule of prices in the Edict.¹⁴² Being an economic hub, the goods available would have come from all over the Empire; this is the reason that three types of beer, including the Celtic variety, were listed, along with various types of wine from areas that would not normally have access to these goods.¹⁴³ Diocletian most likely examined the myriad goods available in Antioch, and from there developed a schedule of prices that could be applied to comparative goods across the Empire, regardless of location, in the belief that the rationality and logic of the Edict would lead to its acceptance.

¹³⁹ Potter 2004, 335.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Rees, 44.

¹⁴² Corcoran, 222.

¹⁴³ Corcoran, 223.

In the schedule of goods there are some notable exceptions as well as peculiar inclusions. For the former, there is no price of any metals, excepting for gold, and the inclusion of gold was most likely meant to augment Diocletian's re-tariffing of the coinage.¹⁴⁴ There are also no goods made of pottery or glass in the Edict, nor many items of luxury that wealthy Romans would have purchased. The one exception to this is the single most expensive item on the list of goods: a pound of Imperial Purple dyed silk. Since the only person likely to be buying purple silk by the pound was the Emperor himself, this inclusion may have been an attempt at propaganda by Diocletian, showing the people he was holding himself to the same standards he expected of them. Of the items that are included, a noticeable pattern begins to emerge, one which has fueled the historical debate about the true aim of the Edict. An interesting view that some historians have advanced is that the Edict on Maximum Prices was not meant to save the average Roman citizen or soldier from being swindled of his money, but rather to state the maximum price that the Army procurers would pay for goods, and that the common soldiers well-being was used as the justification for this.¹⁴⁵ Since the Army was often the single largest buyer on the market, this should have then set prices lower for all other buyers. The evidence of the price schedules seems to support this theory, Diocletian's stated objectives notwithstanding. The items included in the Edict center around foods, simple textiles and materials like cloth and wood, as well as drink, the soldier's ever-ready companion. All of these items are common purchases for both military quartermasters and common soldiers. By stating the maximum price that could be charged for these goods, while refraining from explicitly doing the same for more expensive luxury items,

¹⁴⁴ Potter, 335.

¹⁴⁵ We see this point made by Barnes, Corcoran and Rees in their studies of the Price Edict, as well as a discussion in Potter concerning the Emperor's use of his authority.

Diocletian may have again seen the solution to multiple problems in one action: the Army would spend less and would not be forced into armed procurement, the market should stabilize with lower prices, and there was not likely to be opposition from rich Romans, whose lifestyles should not have been altered in any significant way.

As we saw in studying the historiography of this subject, there is a great deal of confusion as to whether the Price Edict was promulgated across the entire Empire, and to what lasting effect. We know from surviving evidence that the Edict was published in over 40 locations, albeit mostly in the Eastern Empire.¹⁴⁶ Though this makes the Edict the best epigraphic example of the Ancient World to survive, the limited geographical area in which the inscriptions have been found have lead us no closer to better understanding the promulgation and scope of the Edict. The inscriptions, all known copies being in Latin, have often been found in central areas of urban development.¹⁴⁷ This suggests that they were posted in central market areas on materials sufficient enough to survive the tests of time. From this, I believe we can deduce that the Edict was generally meant to be followed, and was not simply an empty gesture issued by the Emperor. But what of the Edict's promulgation? Why was it issued in Latin, yet centered in the Greek-speaking East? An examination of the Preamble and the Price Schedule can help to answer these questions. The language used in the Preamble is clearly meant to be universal; there is no mention of certain areas or specific merchants required to adhere to this doctrine, ergo the entirety of the Empire was expected to follow it. Remember, the answer of an Emperor to a specific complain was a legal ruling in that case, often used for further precedent.

¹⁴⁶ Rees, 43.

¹⁴⁷ Corcoran, 230.

In the absence of a single specific plaintiff the Emperor is answering to, and in regard to the form of the Edict, it is easy to conclude that Edict on Maximum Prices was intended for the entirety of the Empire.

Yet why are there no surviving inscriptions in the West? As we will see in the next chapter, there was a certain autonomy in the Tetrarchy, in which each *Augusti* and *Caesar* were allowed nearly free reign in the enforcement of central policy. This does not mean that they could ignore orders from Diocletian, their superior; rather that promulgating and enforcing Edicts were done at their leisure, and to each Tetrarch's design. This could be seen as a case where the authority Diocletian is attempting to assume over the Roman people is being undermined by his ruling partners reluctance to enforce his word. There is also the question of the distance involved. It may take months for an Edict to travel from the Eastern Empire to the Tetrarchs in the West, and such a sizeable Edict would have required a longer period in which to be inscribed and installed in the market square than shorter Edicts, such as those concerned with denouncing Christians. It may be likely that by the time the Edict was ready to be posted in the West, further instructions from Diocletian concerning abandoning or ignoring the Edict may have arrived. Since the Edict on Maximum Prices was issued in late 301, and the first Edict against the Christian was issued in early 303, the mind of the Emperor may have been drawn away from the threat posed by a runaway economy towards the threat posed by the Christians that Chapter 3 will examine.

What of enforcing the Edict? We know that in the Preamble the same punishment for exceeding maximum prices is extended towards those who choose to simply withdraw goods from the market. Lactantius claims that this is exactly what happened, with riots following soon

after.¹⁴⁸ While Lactantius claims that the unrest caused by the Price Edict caused much blood to be spilled and the Edict to be repealed, there is no evidence that the Edict on Maximum Prices was ever formally repealed. However, likewise there is no evidence to show that the provisions of the Edict were ever followed. In cases of Imperial decree such as this, it is expected that the decree would be referenced in letters, billings, papyri, etc. Each would normally contain a statement asserting that the transaction was held in full accordance with the laws on prices, taxes, etc.¹⁴⁹ There is absolutely no evidence in any surviving sources of this, which has raised serious questions about the enforcement of the Price Edict. I am forced to agree with the majority opinion among scholars, that Diocletian must have realized sometime after issuing the Edict that enforcement would have been nigh on impossible, and the Edict was quietly allowed to lapse. This may help to explain why in the West the Edict was never applied or posted: by the time it reached the West, it had already proven a failure in the East.

Conclusion

But was the Edict on Maximum Prices a failure? Historians certainly believe so. My answer to that question is to ask what the Edict's true purpose was before determining whether it failed. Was the edict intended to fix the economy and stabilize prices? Or was it meant to test whether the Emperor's power to command such things would be accepted by the Roman people? The provisions of the Edict itself were eminently logical and rational, even if they could not be expected to solve such deep-seated economic problems. I believe the case can be made that in spite of economic success or failure, the Edict was an exercise in extending Diocletian's authority

¹⁴⁸ Lactantius, *DMP* 7.7.

¹⁴⁹ Corcoran, 232.

and must be viewed in terms of this. There is no evidence that the authority or legitimacy of the Emperor to interfere in the economy in such a grand way was ever questioned. The riots Lactantius references seem to be more in response to a lack of food on the market as a result of the Edict, not in response to the Edict itself. The people did not resist the authority of the Emperor to command them; they resisted the actual command itself. This is an important point to make in terms of what we will study in Chapter Three, where a command from the Emperor would once again be resisted. The Edict on Maximum Prices should have been a brilliant masterstroke from an Emperor who always sought solutions that solved multiple problems. It would allow Diocletian to placate his power base, stabilize the Market, and extend his authority into an area that Emperors had previously had little control over, all in one move. Unfortunately for Diocletian, the Edict on Maximum Prices would not be nearly as effective as he believed it would be, which may be one reason the Emperor would lash out violently two years later at a religious sect which defied him as openly as economic theory did.

CHAPTER THREE: THE GREAT PERSECUTION: RELIGIOUS FERVOR OR CRIMINAL PUNISHMENT?

Similar to his Edict on Maximum Prices, Diocletian's "Great Persecution" of the Christians has usually been viewed by scholars as an unmitigated disaster. The persecution was supposedly unpopular with the average Roman citizen, was extremely bloody and failed in its goals: to restore respect to the traditional pagan gods through prayer and observance, so that the gods' favor would once again shower Rome with glory and peace. At least, these are the goals that are traditionally ascribed to the persecution. However, I will argue that the true goal of the persecution was not wholly linked to traditional pagan piety, but rather linked to Diocletian's expanding the sphere of influence of the Roman emperor. Diocletian was an innovator and reformer, and many of the changes he instituted were designed to extend the influence of the emperor and his authority farther than at any time in the past. If we view the Great Persecution not as an attempt to stamp out a religious group rival to paganism, but rather as a reaction to a specific group that resisted the authority of the emperor, often in a manner that was public and embarrassing to Diocletian, we can view the Persecution in terms of the expansion of Imperial authority under the Tetrarchy. I will argue several points in order to support this supposition: that the Great Persecution was markedly different than persecution under earlier emperors due to the circumstances of the Crisis of the Third Century; that the so-called sacrifice "litmus test" was not designed to out Christians as much as to out any potentially disloyal citizens; That there are a great deal of unanswered questions about the four Edicts against the Christians, but that Christians themselves played a pivotal role in the expansion of the Persecution and the increasingly violent tenor of the edicts; finally, that there was a perceived link between the

Manichees, also persecuted by Diocletian at the end of the third century, the Christians, and Persia, which called into question the loyalty of the Christians not only to the emperor, but to the State

To begin, what exactly do we know about the Great Persecution of Christians? Sources tell us that between 303 and 305 there were a series of four Edicts published around the Empire. The Edicts were increasingly violent towards Christians, forcing the universal sacrifice of all Roman citizens to the genius of the Emperor, with punishment for refusal ranging from dismissal from a government post to torture and death.¹⁵⁰ We know from Christian sources that the main targets of the Persecution were the Christian clergy, the Scriptures, and church buildings themselves¹⁵¹. The sources tell us that many were imprisoned, and offered freedom if they sacrificed¹⁵². Finally, we know that ultimately the Persecution was a failure, since Constantine I, made sole emperor after defeating Licinus in 325, was at the very least favorable towards Christianity, even if his own faith has been fervently discussed by historians.¹⁵³ The Christian narrative that historians have so often relied upon leaves little room for questioning these facts: pagans persecuted the Christians because they hated their religion, the Christians steadfastly stood their ground and were eventually rescued by the supposed first Christian emperor in Constantine.

¹⁵⁰ *Act of Felix the Bishop* in Roger Rees 2004.

¹⁵¹ *HE* 2.4, *DMP* 7.11.

¹⁵² *HE* 6.9.

¹⁵³ Drake, 2002.

Historical Background

In order to unravel the larger question of motivation behind the Great Persecutions we must determine what sets this persecution apart from earlier persecutions under other emperors. The emperors Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Septimus Severus (reportedly), Decius, Valerian and Aurelian had all persecuted Christians during their reigns; all appear in Lactantius' work describing the untimely ends they suffered as a result. So what set Diocletian's persecution apart from these others? Why is it commonly referred to as the Great Persecution, rather than the final? A number of factors emerge that allow us to see Diocletian's attempts at persecuting the Christians in a new light in terms of scope, targets, and motivation. It may be easiest to recap the earlier persecutions, then analyze Diocletian's actions in juxtaposition of his predecessors.

The persecutions of Nero and Domitian can be lumped together due to their similarities and chronological closeness. Under each, the Christians were used as popular scapegoats, particularly when a natural disaster or tragic accident happened, such as the burning of Rome under Nero's reign.¹⁵⁴ Domitian introduced the concept of terror in his persecutions of the Christians, a development that can be seen in later, more widespread persecutions. However, neither attempted to force the Christians to sacrifice to pagan gods, nor were there attempts to spread the persecution to the entire empire; it was mostly contained to the city of Rome itself. The emperor Trajan outlawed Christianity in 112, although this has commonly been seen as an attack on Jews, not Christians, the thought being that Judaism was commonly confused with Christianity.¹⁵⁵ Although there were sporadic "persecutions" under Trajan, these could more

¹⁵⁴ Frend 112.

¹⁵⁵ Frend, 22.

correctly be termed pogroms, since the main motivating factor was local unrest and mob violence. Of particular significance to Diocletian's persecution is Trajan's famous letter to Pliny in 112 where he instructs his governor that that, even though Christianity is technically illegal, Roman governors are not to seek out Christians for punishment, nor are they to accept denouncements of citizens as Christians.¹⁵⁶ Punishment for being a Christian was most likely reserved for those who openly practiced or, more importantly, proselytized, and were therefore criminals who had broken Roman law more than members of a rival religious sect. The Diocletianic persecution steps away from this rule, as it appears that Christians were actively sought out, first in the army and bureaucratic ranks, then later in the general populace.

Under Septimus Severus we have the first evidence of a widespread movement against Christians, aimed mainly at new converts, and there is the first evidence of movements against Christian property.¹⁵⁷ Severus in 202 forbade the conversion of gentiles to Judaism or Christianity, a move probably played a role in inspiring the Jewish uprisings of 198-199.¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, it is from the Severan persecution that historians gain most of their insight on the growth of the Church as a property holder in the first two centuries, as the evidence of the persecution shows the extent to which the church's property was a target.

The persecutions of later emperors such as Decius and Valerian are the closest in spirit and action to the Diocletianic persecution. Although there does not appear the desire to truly eradicate the entire faith, the Decian and Valerianic persecutions no doubt laid the groundwork

¹⁵⁶ Frend 6.

¹⁵⁷ Frend 323.

¹⁵⁸ Frend 320.

that Diocletian would later follow. Decius and Valerian all began their persecutions by confiscating the property of Christians, both of rich private citizens and of well known church properties.¹⁵⁹ Under Decius we see the first universal order to sacrifice to the genius of the Emperor, an innovation historians have often taken as evidence that the persecutions were primarily motivated by religious fervor. The traditional historiography of the order to sacrifice has been that the Emperors were seeking to placate the Gods who had punished the empire for its religious transgressions with the events of the first half of the third century; This same argument has been applied to the Diocletianic persecution. The Valerianic persecution stands out from Decius' in that it did order sacrifice, but allowed Christians the opportunity to perform some token of loyalty to the emperor in lieu of a sacrifice to the imperial genius. This followed the policy that Jews had been allowed in previous centuries.¹⁶⁰ Both Decius and Valerian sought out Christian clergy in order to convince them to sacrifice, and evidence shows that many did.¹⁶¹ However, no matter what the Christian writers from later centuries claim, there is evidence in the primary sources that Roman magistrates often went to great lengths to secure sacrifices, and the release of Christian prisoners, rather than seeking out their deaths.

Analysis

The Great Persecution under Diocletian follows many of the precedents of these earlier persecutions, but is unique in many ways. First, disregarding the letter of Trajan, which was still technically Roman law, the agents of Diocletian sought out Christians in the Army and in

¹⁵⁹ Frend 426.

¹⁶⁰ Frend 423.

¹⁶¹ Frend 409.

Imperial service, attempting to force sacrifice or dismissal from their posts.¹⁶² Second, while Diocletian did move against church property, confiscating it for the imperial coffers¹⁶³, he also moved to destroy certain church properties, namely recognizable buildings and most importantly, sacred texts.¹⁶⁴ This is an important shift in the focus of the persecution, since the attacks on Christian texts show a more knowledgeable approach to understanding what was important to Christian life and worship. Going along with targeting texts, the persecutors under Diocletian targeted urban church officials, those who had grown to fill important societal and leadership roles.¹⁶⁵ It is my belief that these two shifts show that the Diocletianic persecution was more intent on eradicating Christianity than earlier persecutions may have been; the motive behind this will be explained later. A final important innovation of the Great Persecution, Diocletian not only ordered the universal sacrifice by all citizens, but sacrificial altars were reportedly set up in all courthouses, and litigants were forced to sacrifice before being allowed to plead their cases.¹⁶⁶ This cut off all but the wealthiest Christians, who could afford pagan lawyers, from the legal protections of being Roman citizens. The purpose behind this act was to remove the legal rights from those citizens did not follow their legal responsibilities as citizens and sacrifice to the Emperor's genius. My argument is that the distinction is subtle, but most important: Diocletian was not punishing a religious sect, he was punishing those members of the sect that did not fulfill

¹⁶² *HE* 4.2.

¹⁶³ *DMP* 7.11.

¹⁶⁴ *Act of Felix*, 179.

¹⁶⁵ *HE* 6.9.

¹⁶⁶ *DMP* 15.5.

their responsibilities as citizens; Diocletian was more concerned that Christians did not pay loyalty to him than what god they prayed to.

The preceding pages have raised an important question: if the Diocletianic persecution was certainly unique in both scope and focus from its predecessors, then what motivated the persecution and its innovations? My answer contains multiple vectors: First, the Crisis of the Third Century brought about changes in the social fabric of the Empire, not the least of which was the rise of emperors from Illyricum, one of the least Christianized areas in the Empire. Especially important to these emperors was securing their throne against usurpation and extending their authority over the Empire as their predecessors had been unable to. If a certain religious sect such as the Christians stood in the way of these goals, that would be the reason for attacking them, not their belief in an alternate theology. Second, Christians themselves were actors during the persecutions. What I mean by this is that Christians did not idly sit by and allow themselves to be persecuted; the actions of Christians played a pivotal role in widening the scope and tenor of the Great Persecution, the reason that there were four edicts eventually issued, instead of a single edict. Finally, there is a link between Diocletian's persecution of the Manichees in Africa and the persecution of the Christians across the Empire. The tensions with Persia during this period, along with the Manichees purported link to that Empire helped dictate the motivations behind the Great Persecution. These vectors all point to a single conclusion: the Great Persecution came not as a result of traditional pagan piety, but from a complex social and political situation encountered by an emperor, Diocletian, who was intent on expanding his authority and influence over the Roman people to unprecedented heights. The result was an

attempt to crush a religious sect that defied his authority and resolutely stood in his way politically and socially.

The primary sources of the Great Persecution have presented to us the image of a sacrificial altar set up in front of Roman magistrates, who sit in judgment, waiting for those who will refuse to sacrifice and therefore reveal themselves as Christians.¹⁶⁷ While this is certainly compelling imagery used in an effort to portray angry pagans attempting to decimate the Christian population, the scene portrayed here may not be entirely accurate. Lactantius and Eusebius write that all citizens were compelled to sacrifice to the genius of the emperor, something Christians could not bring themselves to do. They see in this, of course, an attempt to identify and punish every Christian in the Empire. However, if we look deeper, we may be able to see motive in the sacrifice litmus that has not been brought to light. The sacrifice *was* a litmus test; it was designed to reveal a certain group in the population. However, I argue that the intended target of the sacrifice litmus was not solely Christians. The test, rather, was designed to root out any citizen who was unable or unwilling to choose the correct hierarchy between gods, emperor, and state, and therefore would be seen as having questionable loyalties.

The *Constitutia Antonina* of 212 extended Roman citizenship far wider than ever before, the result of which was that many Romans were not only given the rights of a citizen, but were burdened with the responsibilities of citizens too. This included sacrificing to pagan gods to appease them, but more importantly, required sacrificing to the Imperial genius to show their loyalty to the emperor. Securing the loyalty of the citizenry, I argue, was far more important to Diocletian than in enforcing conformity to pagan religious practices. Diocletian never claimed to

¹⁶⁷ DMP 14.4

be a god; however, he did claim to be Jupiter's agent on Earth, acting in his stead. This was an emperor who reinstated Decius' hated *Deus et Dominus* address, the man who wished to be referred to as Iovius. Diocletian was not about to allow a group of citizens to place their loyalty to their god above their loyalty to his genius and the Roman state. The refusal of the Christians to sacrifice was made even worse by their association with certain elements in society that were not always the most loyal citizens of the Empire.¹⁶⁸ When Christians began refusing to participate in the universal order to sacrifice, the religious group known for its distance to Roman social life and a willingness to participate in urban riots became an insidious threat to public order and the stability of the Roman state. Added to this were a number of scandalous refusals to participate in mandatory military service, and quickly the Christians became precisely the group that Diocletian was searching for in the order to sacrifice.¹⁶⁹

The Christians were not allowed the dispensation that Jews had: to offer in place of sacrifice alternate forms of showing their loyalty. The reasons for this have been debated, but the most likely reason is that Christianity was not seen as the ancient religion that Judaism was, and pagan Romans felt they need not respect it.¹⁷⁰ This differentiation between the two is important in examining the sacrifice litmus test. Decius also ordered a universal sacrifice, which caused many Christians to lapse;¹⁷¹ Valerian did allow the Christians alternative means of expressing

¹⁶⁸ Arnaldo Momigliano *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians*. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1986. 136.

¹⁶⁹ Frend 487.

¹⁷⁰ Momigliano, 129.

¹⁷¹ Frend 408.

loyalty, such as praying for the health of the emperor.¹⁷² Diocletian did not allow this, and while there is a great deal of evidence that many Christians did lapse during the persecution and sacrifice, the social makeup and size of the Christian population had significantly changed between the Decian persecution and Diocletian's. What became apparent to Diocletian was a significant group in the Empire was stubbornly refusing to sacrifice, calling into question not only their loyalty, but their very status as citizens.

A final piece of evidence I wish to add concerns the three *Acta Martyrdom* that can be linked to the Diocletianic persecution.¹⁷³ The Acts of Crispina, Felix the Bishop, and Julius the Veteran are remarkably consistent in their portrayal of the martyrs "persecution". Each is led before a magistrate, where they are ordered to sacrifice, or in Felix's case, hand over scripture. Each refuses, and are in turn asked again and again. In the case of Julius, the magistrate seems to be begging the man to simply sacrifice, decrying his stubbornness when "all of Africa has sacrificed".¹⁷⁴ There seems to be no joy taken in the Christians' refusal to sacrifice; this is no show trial intended for a quick and bloody end. Instead of the picture that Lactantius paints of tortures and gleeful pagan extermination of Christians, we instead see a bureaucracy going about its business, confused as to why these people are willing to die instead of performing a simple command. The martyrs' ends themselves are incredibly important to this point also. None of the three is tortured; none are burnt alive nor tortured to death for the spectacle of the crowd. Instead, each of the three is simply beheaded, the punishment for a criminal who had broken

¹⁷² Frend 423.

¹⁷³ Rees, 176-182.

¹⁷⁴ *Act of Julius the Veteran* in Rees 2004, 181.

Roman law, which they had done through their refusal to obey an Imperial command. This is evidence that the persecution was not about the gleeful torture and extermination of Christians, but rather about punishing those seen as criminals who refused to perform their civic duty.

This brings us to the Edicts themselves. The primary sources concur that there were four Edicts, posted between February 303 and early 304, although historians often see an edict posted by Diocletian in 295 outlawing incestuous marriage as a precursor to the four edicts aimed at the Christians during this period.¹⁷⁵ The main problem historians face in studying the Edicts is that none of the four survive in any form except as referenced in Christian works about the Persecution. This loss of the original form and format of the edicts has prevented us from knowing the stated motive behind the acts of the Great Persecution, the ways in which the emperor's authority to attack the Christians was presented, as was the case in the Edict on Maximum Prices, or even the extent that the Persecution was intended to go in securing the loyalty of the Christians to imperial authority. However, a study of what we do know about the edicts, both from primary sources and from what we know of the historical context, is helpful in allowing us to better understand how the Persecution escalated and required four edicts to achieve its goals. It will also be helpful for us to delve into a topic most historians are loathe to handle in their treatments of the Great Persecution: to ask how the actions of Christians themselves played a role in both motivating the persecution and inspiring the growing violence that resulted.

¹⁷⁵ Corcoran, 173.

The edict posted in 295 has been referred to as an effort by Diocletian to inspire more *romanitas* (Roman-ness) in his subjects. It reinforced earlier Roman law that incestuous marriages between close family members were not only illegal, it was an insult to the gods. The edict itself is rich in the language of morality and piety, and Corcoran argues that the proximity of the edict to the outbreak of war with Persia, a land often associated with incest, may mean the edict is more propaganda than imperial policy.¹⁷⁶ This may be true, but if we take into account that one of the main charges against Christianity had often been of cannibalism (from the Sacrament) and incest (Christians often referred to each other as Brother or Sister- even married couples) and add to that a supposed link between the Persians and the Christians, as I will argue later, it is easy for us to see a link between this edict, the letter on the Manichees in 302, and the beginning of the Great Persecution in 303. In this case, the argument could be made that Diocletian as early as 295 took heed of the perils Christianity posed to his authority, and began taking steps to undermine its position as a legitimate religion, only moving towards open persecution as tensions escalated between stubborn Christians and an Emperor obsessed with loyalty. There is also the troubling question of the orders to sacrifice, as Diocletian at first orders only those closest to him, the Army, civil service and household staff, to sacrifice (Frend places this at the end of 302), then later expands that order to his own family and the population as a whole.¹⁷⁷

The first Edict that began the Great Persecution was posted on February 24th, 303 in Nicomedia, where the emperor was currently residing. Eusebius presents us with the story of the

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Frend 489-90.

first martyr of this persecution, a man moved by God to tear the edict from its posted spot who was subsequently the first Christian executed.¹⁷⁸ The first edict called for the razing of churches, the seizure and burning of scriptures, a loss of civil rights for certain high ranking Christians, and the re-enslavement of *Caesarini* who were Christian.¹⁷⁹ The only known casualties of the first edict were those who resisted, and these were executed. The most important things to take away from the first edict are the lack of violence directed towards the Christian people who obeyed the emperor's will and did not resist, and the focus of the attack on scriptures, much as the attack on the Manichees had done. Eusebius points out that Constantius did raze the church buildings, but did not attack the Christian people themselves. Lactantius presents evidence that torture was threatened against the Christians at this time, but not yet carried out.¹⁸⁰

The second edict was posted sometime in the summer of 303 and Eusebius links it directly to an outbreak of revolt among the Syrian and Melinite populations¹⁸¹, while Lactantius claims it is as a result of a mysterious fire in Diocletian's palace.¹⁸² This second edict called for the arrest of senior clergy, possibly because they were seen as rabble-rousers or troublemakers who had stirred up the revolt in response to the first edict. Taking into account the growing urban social role of Christian leaders, it is without a doubt they were the most visible Christians to

¹⁷⁸ *HE* 5.1

¹⁷⁹ Corcoran 180.

¹⁸⁰ *DMP* 13.1

¹⁸¹ *HE* 6.8

¹⁸² *DMP* 14.2

imperial authorities¹⁸³, and it is possible to extrapolate their resistance to the first Edict from the sheer number of those jailed by the second.¹⁸⁴ According to Lactantius, at this time the entire population was ordered to sacrifice and various torture were designed to punish those who wouldn't.¹⁸⁵

The third edict is quite interesting because it seems to suggest a sheer exasperation of the Imperial authorities with the stubborn Christian population. Posted November 303 and coinciding with the celebration of Diocletian's *vicennallia*, the edict offered freedom for those who would sacrifice. If we are to believe Eusebius' account that the prisons were overflowing with Christian clergy, this edict seems to show a shift from negative to positive encouragement in forcing the Christians to sacrifice and show their loyalty.¹⁸⁶ Corcoran points out that general amnesties were common during imperial celebrations, and this may have been a final attempt to bring the Christians into harmony with the majority of pagan Roman society.¹⁸⁷ From this edict we also get the majority of lapses among clergy, with many either sacrificing or being forced to sacrifice and being freed.

The final edict was posted in early 304 and has mostly been attributed to Galerius due to Diocletian's illness suffered on his return trip from Rome.¹⁸⁸ This edict commanded universal sacrifice amongst the entire population, and appears to have been mainly confined to the East

¹⁸³ Corcoran 181.

¹⁸⁴ *HE* 6.9.

¹⁸⁵ *DMP* 15.1-4.

¹⁸⁶ *HE* 6.10.

¹⁸⁷ Corcoran 182.

¹⁸⁸ *DMP* 17.1-9

due to the politics of the Tetrarchy, which was rapidly eroding at this time.¹⁸⁹ This edict appears to be the motivator of the majority of deaths and violence done under the Great Persecution, which may be the reason Galerius is often given blame. What is apparent from examining these five edicts, as well as the various orders to sacrifice, is that there was a discernable escalation in the scope and policies of the Great Persecution, the reason that four edicts were required rather than a single edict. The questions that we now must answer is why this escalation occurred, and what role did the Christians themselves play in this escalation?

If we remove purely religious motivations from the persecution of Christians under Diocletian, we must find some other factors that drove the emperor to issue four edicts of increasing violence aimed at a particular segment of the population. This is an area where I feel historians have often failed to recognize that role that the Christians present in the Roman Empire during this period played in the Great Persecution. For too long, owing to the tone of the Christian primary sources, the victims of the persecution have been seen as precisely that: victims, people who have acts perpetrated on them with no sense of historical agency given to their actions in relation to the acts they have endured. The truth is, the Christians were an increasingly recognizable social group that held social mores and customs that were different than the majority of pagan Romans, and they were a subset of the population that was easily distinguished as being alien to Roman society as a whole. The actions of this highly visible group, particularly in resistance to the emperor's authority, were in large part what motivated and drove the Diocletianic persecution.

¹⁸⁹ Corcoran 182.

That the Christians were a recognizable subset to the population is inarguable. They often kept themselves aloof from Roman social life, and would often refuse the opportunity to take part in public displays of their loyalty and affection to the emperor and the State.¹⁹⁰ Further, the Christians were sometimes suspected as a secret society, one with rites and rituals that pagans knew little to nothing about. This is the reason that the Sacrament was confused with actual cannibalism, and that Christians were often charged with incest. Though recent histories have examined the view of Christianity at this time as a religion dominated and proselytized by women, the fact that women were such integral parts of the spread of Christianity often opened it up to attacks on its validity. Further, the regimented structure of the Christian church could be seen by emperors as a threat to their legitimacy and authority, especially when Christian writers were having open discussions about where their loyalty lay: with lord Caesar or lord Christ?¹⁹¹ That those same Christian writers were increasingly engaging with pagan writers in what could be termed a war of pamphlets served to introduce the otherness of Christianity to the Roman population, as well as its pagan leadership. Momigliano expresses the tensions best when he says that to be Christian at this time was to have both your loyalties and *romanitas* questioned.¹⁹²

If we examine these tensions, then add to them Diocletian's actions to extend his authority and secure the loyalty of the population, what emerges is a powder keg waiting for a spark; the actions of many Christians would prove to be that spark. As I mentioned before, Christians had a stereotype of openly rebelling against the emperor's authority, possibly because

¹⁹⁰ Momigliano, 135.

¹⁹¹ Frend 211.

¹⁹² Momigliano 136.

they were actively seeking martyrdom at the hands of Roman officials.¹⁹³ There is the account of the conscript Maximilian, who in 295 refused to give the oath of service on the grounds he was a pacifist Christian, as well as the deaths of Marcellus the Centurion who threw his belt to the ground in the midst of a parade dedicated to Maximian Herculus, and Fabio's the standard bearer who did likewise.¹⁹⁴ These problems of military discipline may have been the reason that the first order to sacrifice was aimed at the army and civil service, but the actions of Deacon Romanus in 302 not only embarrassed and angered Diocletian, but showed him that there was a serious problem with the Christians accepting his authority. Romanus had the audacity to barge into Diocletian's palace as court was beginning with the normal sacrifice and loudly denounced the practice.¹⁹⁵ Unlike the others, who were executed as criminals, Diocletian's anger at Romanus' insulting behavior caused him to cut the Christian's tongue out and have him imprisoned for a year before he was executed. From this incident on the eve of the posting of the first edict of the Great Persecution, we can infer that the persecution may not have been caused by religious fervor so much as personal enmity the Christians engendered in the emperor they refused to submit to.

One last point I wish to address on this topic is Galerius' so-called "Reichstag Fire" that prompted Diocletian's anger and the escalation of the Great Persecution. The primary sources tell us that it was Galerius who set the palace fire in 303 as a way to convince Diocletian to attack

¹⁹³ Frend 351.

¹⁹⁴ Frend 487.

¹⁹⁵ Barnes 1981, 20-21.

the Christians, who Galerius supposedly hated.¹⁹⁶ The result was the order of all household staff to sacrifice and the execution of several eunuchs, who had become powerful and influential forces in court life, partially because they controlled access to the emperor. These eunuchs were Christians, and the link between them and Diocletian's wife and daughter has often been used to show that Diocletian was actually favorable to Christianity until the interruption of the *haruspices* and the palace fire.¹⁹⁷ Historians have to this point mainly relied on Lactantius' account of the fires without ever questioning if the fires might have actually been set by the Christian eunuchs in an effort to frighten Diocletian. Remember, when the Emperor Carus, Diocletian's emperor, was struck dead by a lightning bolt while campaigning in Persia, it was seen as a sure sign that the gods were displeased with his actions. Would not a fire in Diocletian's personal quarters have done much to change his mind about persecuting the Christians? Not to mention that when the first fire did nothing but anger the emperor, a second fire came closer to actually killing him.¹⁹⁸ I find it remarkable that to this point no historian has suggested that the fires may have actually been set by Christians in Diocletian's palace, as this could be seen as yet another way in which the Christians resisted the emperor's authority and provoked the violence of the Persecution.

A final topic that supports the argument that the Great Persecution was more concerned with earthly loyalty than heavenly devotion concerns the link between the Christian persecution under Diocletian and that of the Manichees. Historians have often seen the persecution of the

¹⁹⁶ *DMP* 14.2.

¹⁹⁷ Frend 445.

¹⁹⁸ Frend 492.

Manichees in 302 as a necessary precursor to the persecution of the Christians, a "dry run" before the attack on the larger group. However, I argue that the persecution of the Manichees and Christians were not seen as two separate acts by Diocletian, but as parts to the whole of enforcing his authority. It can even be argued that Diocletian may not have seen or understood the difference between Manichaeism and Christianity at all, only seeing the ways in which members of both groups defied his authority. Monotheistic groups were not unique to this point in Roman history, as the cults of Sol Invictus and Mithra were quite popular, although the monotheistic cults that had their background in the East of the Empire were different. Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism all saw the world as a struggle between the forces of Light and Dark, Good and Evil. These religions also did not hesitate to criticize the emperor and pagan gods for being on the wrong side of the struggle.¹⁹⁹ Added to this was the fact that Mani himself was received by Queen Zenobia of the defunct Palmyrene Empire during the late third century, and the links between Christian and Manichean groups to revolts in Alexandria in 296,²⁰⁰ and it becomes a possibility that Diocletian saw similarities in the religious groups that were not there. If that were the case, then the link that Diocletian saw between Manichaeism and Persia would have been extended to Christianity, making their refusal to bow to his authority all the more troublesome.

Unlike the persecution edicts, Diocletian's letter on the Manichees does survive, and it becomes an important source for our understanding of the persecutions of both groups. The letter attacks the Manichees for their transgressions, which include: defying natural limits, new belief

¹⁹⁹ Williams, 160.

²⁰⁰ Heichelheim, 424.

criticizing the old, stubbornness, and above all, their emergence from their "native" home in Persian to cause trouble and unrest in the Roman Empire.²⁰¹ The letter also accuses the Manichees of contaminating Roman society with their Persian habits, all charges that are reminiscent of those leveled against the Christians. If we extend some of these same conclusions to the persecution of the Christians, those rebellious urban groups that continually refused to bow to the emperor's authority, then it becomes plain to see that the threat posed by these religious groups was not to traditional pagan religion as much as it was to Diocletian's authority and legitimacy, as well as the safety of the Roman State.

I have attempted to turn nearly a millennium's worth of historiography on the subject of the Great Persecution upon its head in the preceding pages. The history of the Diocletianic persecution of Christians has always followed the narrative of the Christian primary sources, but that narrative no longer appears to be the most likely explanation of why the emperor chose to attack a significant subset of the population after two decades of peaceful coexistence. The argument of Roman paganism in decline during this period has been thoroughly debunked, yet historians still see the Great Persecution as a last gasp of pagan emperors to revive their failing system. Yet if paganism was still thriving at the beginning of the fourth century, Rome was prosperous, there was little conflict on its borders, why would Diocletian choose to start bloodshed anew? Historians have always pointed that this was the first stable period during his reign in which Diocletian had the opportunity to attack the Christians, seeing in these actions the long-view strategist Diocletian has always been considered. But if he had no plans to persecute the Christians from the beginning of his reign, how does that explain Diocletian's ambivalence to

²⁰¹ "Manichaean Rescript" in Rees 2004, 174-5.

the religion and the supposed Christian leanings of his wife and daughter? Would an emperor who hated a religious group allow himself to be surrounded by members of that group? A more likely explanation follows.

Conclusion

Diocletian did not hate Christianity, at least not at first; he most likely was a devout pagan, yet Roman paganism had shown itself over the preceding centuries to be incredibly open to absorbing new religious groups, as long as those groups recognized the superiority of the Roman pantheon and the Roman State. However, when Diocletian, in his efforts to expand imperial authority and define its legitimacy, was presented with a group that: had an alternate power structure to the Empire that members believed were invested with a higher power; had a habit of publicly defying the emperor's wishes; was seen by many as a frightening secret society with mysterious rituals; had a proclivity towards riot and rebellion; and finally may have been seen as related to a group in Africa, the Manichees, believed to be Persian in nature and disloyal to the core, he was left with the choice of securing their loyalty or attempting to eradicate the group. As 302CE showed, Diocletian attempted to wipe out the Manichees, but he took a different tact with the Christians. Beginning with efforts to secure the loyalty of Christians to the Imperial genius, and escalated by a persistent and stubborn refusal to bow to his will, Diocletian slowly escalated the persecution, turning to violence when he himself was attacked by two fires set in his palace. It is most important above all to remember that the primary sources show us a continuous effort by the Roman magistrates to secure sacrifices in order to let citizens go. They were not there to torture and execute Christians for being Christian; however they were perfectly willing to punish Christians as criminals for refusing the orders of their emperor. The Great

Persecution of the Christians may have been framed by the order to sacrifice to the pagan gods of Rome, but the heart of the matter lay in sacrificing to the imperial genius as a visible way to show loyalty and support to the emperor Diocletian.

CONCLUSION

By 304, Diocletian's situation was looking dire. The Emperor cut short a visit to Rome after being insulted by his reception, and returned to the East in the middle of winter. Somewhere along the journey, he contracted an illness which kept him bedridden and out of sight. After months of not being seen, rumors swept the populace that Diocletian had died, and that the *Caesar* Galerius was in Nicomedia to seize power. When Diocletian appeared again in public in early 305, his appearance was disconcerting. He appeared disheveled and emaciated, and so very tired. It is hard to discern whether it was illness or a combination of the failures of his policies which had wrought such a change on the Emperor, but Diocletian knew he no longer had the strength or energy to rule the vast Roman Empire. He called an assembly of his beloved Armies, and ascended the hill from which he would descend not as an Emperor, but as a private citizen. Even in this, the innovator in Diocletian stands out, going out as the first Emperor in history to abdicate his position, a precedent Diocletian hoped to set for his Tetrarchic partners, allowing for an orderly transfer of power. Unfortunately, the end of Diocletian's rule would see a return to civil war, as the Tetrarchy consumed itself in struggles for ultimate power.

What of the Emperor's innovations? What was to be the legacy that Diocletian left behind, the *memoria* that was so important to Roman emperors? We must ask ourselves in what way did Diocletian leave a lasting impact upon Roman society after his abdication, and later death. The easiest way to answer this question is to examine the ways in which Diocletian extended the authority of Roman emperors further and wider than ever before, before we examine the lasting impact that would have on history. To begin, the assumption of divine cognomen by Diocletian must be viewed not merely as a mark of pagan piety, but as a savvy

political tactic employed by Diocletian in order to safeguard his person, authority, and legitimacy. However, it also served the other consequence of attaching Diocletian's name to that of Rome's supreme god, Jupiter, creating a special relationship between emperor and God. The invention of the Tetrarchy as a means of sharing and stratifying political power in the Empire was an important innovation. However, sharing political power was nothing new to Romans; the divine fount that the Tetrarchy cited as the inspiration and source of their Earthly legitimacy was something entirely new, an innovation that would have lasting effect.

The Emperor's interference in everyday life of Roman citizens was just as important, if not more so. By insinuating that the Emperor was not only able, but willing and qualified to make choices for his subjects in the realms of economics and religion, Diocletian crossed another metaphorical Rubicon, from whence there was no going back. Never before had an Emperor instituted a long-term, multifaceted plan to adjust and control the economy; that particular aspect of Roman society had never been viewed as the province of the Emperor. However, Diocletian, with some astute legal wrangling and a centralized State bureaucracy, extended the authority of the Emperor into this field, claiming not only the authority, but the imperative to interfere on behalf of his subjects, as they were children to his avatar as a divine parent. Likewise in terms of religion. The Roman Empire had normally been quite inclusive of new religions. There may have been some clashes, some social instability caused by the influx of new peoples and new beliefs, but for the most part, the Empire was remarkably able to absorb new religions and their followers, provided, of course that they were subjugated to the existing Roman pantheon. Never would a Roman in the time of Augustus or Marcus Aurelius believe that a violent purge would be carried out against a sect that stood in the Emperor's way; that would have been simply

unbelievable. Regardless, that is exactly the type of power that Diocletian assumed for himself, the power to make or break religions, to command what his subjects could worship. This extraordinary extensions of the Emperor's prerogative was not seized on a whim, nor temporarily; Diocletian made it plain that his authority extended even into the most private areas of a Roman citizens life. While the targets of this Persecution were the Christians, the attempt to created a society devoid of religions that deviated from the norm would eventually backfire, as the ascension of Christianity would later overrun the traditional monotheism of the Empire.

Diocletian left the Roman Empire in a state of flux. The divine brotherhood of the Tetrarchy was shaken; the economy had stabilized, but prices were still high; and the Persecution of the Christians had not achieved any of the Emperor's aims. However, in this historical moment we can see the genesis of many trends that would shape the history of Western Civilization for centuries to come. The reign of Diocletian should not be seen a historical footnote to that of Constantine I. Neither should Diocletian's innovations be seen as failures. Instead the history of the spread of Christianity and the development of rule by divine right, arguably two of the most influential trends in the history of Western Civilizations find their roots in the reign of this emperor. Diocletian's attempts to create a new vision of Imperial legitimacy, authority, and control not only laid the groundwork for these trends, but resulted in the rule of the Emperor who would successfully integrate all into a new vision of Roman society: Constantine I, the "first Christian Emperor".

I have attempted to look at three specific examples of Diocletian's innovations during his reign at the end of the third century in order to make this point. By creating a power structure tied up in divine cognomen, but based on protecting his legitimacy and authority from

usurpation, Diocletian helped set the precedent for later Emperors, Kings, and Queens to claim that their rule was granted by divine favor, and absolute. By involving himself in the economy, arguing that his actions were called for by the greater good, Diocletian gained unprecedented control over a sector of society where Emperors had never interfered. Finally, by interfering with the religions of Roman citizens and designating his authority as greater than that of the Christian god, Diocletian not only created the precedent for unheard of control over the private lives of citizens, but forever altered the Roman Empire's history of religious inclusive freedom and created the context under which a monotheistic society under a single, state-sponsored religion could evolve. The innovations of the Emperor Diocletian, aimed at extending the authority of Roman Emperors, would prove to have a lasting effect on the history of Western Civilization for the next 1400 years.

APPENDIX A: COINAGE OF THE LATER ROMAN EMPIRE

Coins of Diocletian

1. RIC 134 Diocletian AV Aureus. Rome mint, 286 AD. IMP C C VAL DIOCLETIANVS P F
AVG, laureate, draped & cuirassed bust right / IOVI CONSER-VAT AVGG, nude
Jupiter standing left, holding thunderbolt & sceptre.
2. RIC 28-Cohen147 Diocletian AE Antinomians. Lyons mint, 290-291 AD. IMP
DIOCLETIANVS AVG, radiate cuirassed bust right / IOVI AVGG, Jupiter standing left
holding Victory on globe & scepter, eagle at foot left, A in ex. Cohen 147, Bastian 315.
3. RIC 50 Sear'88 #3517 Diocletian Silvered AE Antoninianus. Lyons mint, 289 AD. IMP C
DIOCLETIANVS AVG, radiate, draped & cuirassed bust right / IOVI TVTATORI
AVGG, Jupiter standing left holding Victory & sceptre, eagle at feet, P in ex. RIC V 50,
Cohen 300.
4. RIC 168v Diocletian AE Antoninianus. Rome mint. 290 IMP DIOCLETIANVS AVG, radiate
cuirassed bust right / IOVI FVLGERATORI, Jupiter standing facing, head right, left leg
drawn back, right arm up about to hurl thunderbolt, mantle draped on left arm, eagle at
foot to left, XXIA in ex.
5. RIC 323 star Diocletian AE Antoninianus. Siscia mint. IMP C C VAL DIOCLETIANVS P F
AVG, radiate, draped & cuirassed bust right / IOV ET HERCV CONSER AVGG, Jupiter
receiving victory from Hercules. RIC V 323.

Coins of Carausius

6. RIC 1[mdc] Sear'88 #3571 Carausius, Diocletian & Maximianus Æ Antoninianus. Struck circa
292-293 AD, Camulodunum mint. CARAVSIVS ET FRATRES SVI, jugate, radiate &

cuirassed busts of Maximianus, Diocletian & Carausius left / PAX AVGGG, Pax standing left, holding olive-branch & vertical scepter; S P/C. RIC 1 [Maximianus, Diocletian & Carausius].

7. Carausius, AE Antoninianus. Camulodunum (Colchester) mint. IMP C CARAVSIVS AVG, radiate, draped bust right / IOVI CONSER, Emperor facing right, receiving globe from Jupiter, facing left. Mintmark SPC. Not in RIC or Webb. Closest match is Akerman 64 var (with IOVI CONS), unpublished.

All attributes direct from WildWinds.com .

Coin images courtesy cngcoins.com, wildwinds.com, beastcoins.com, Ars-Aeterna, and Dane Kurth.

APPENDIX B: PREAMBLE OF THE EDICT ON MAXIMAL PRICES.

1. The national honor and the dignity and majesty of Rome demand that the fortune of our State-to which, next to the immortal gods, we may, in memory of the wars which we have successfully waged, return thanks for the tranquil and profoundly quiet condition of the world-be also faithfully administered and duly endowed with the blessings of that peace for which we have laboriously striven; to the end that we, who under the gracious favor of the gods have repressed the furious depredations, in the past, of barbarous tribes by the destructions of those nations themselves, may for all time gird with the bulwarks due to justice the peace which has been established.

2. To be sure, if any spirit of self-restraint were holding in check those practices by which the raging and boundless avarice is inflamed, an avarice which, without regard for the human race, not yearly or monthly or daily only, but almost every hour and even every moment, hastens toward its own development and increase; or if the common fortunes could with calmness bear this orgy of license, by which, under their unhappy star, they are from day to day ripped to pieces-peradventure there would seem to be room left for shutting our eyes and holding our peace, since the united endurance of men's minds would ameliorate this detestable enormity and pitiable condition.

3. But since it is the sole desire of untamed fury to feel no love for the ties of our common humanity; and since among the wicked and lawless it is held to be, so to speak, the religious duty of an avarice that swells and grows with fierce flames, that, in harrying the fortunes of all, it should desist of necessity rather than voluntarily; and since those whom extreme poverty has brought to a perception of their most wretched condition cannot further keep their eyes shut; it suits us, who are the watchful parents of the whole human race, that justice step in as an arbiter in the case, in order that the long-hoped-for result, which humanity could not achieve by itself, may, by the remedies which our fore-thought suggests, be contributed toward the general alleviation of all.

4. And of this matter, it is true, as the common knowledge of all recognizes and indisputable facts proclaim, the consideration is almost too late, since we form plans or delay discovered remedies in the hope that, as was to be expected from natural justice, humanity, detected in most odious crimes, might work out its own reformation; for we thought it far better that the censure of in-tolerable robbery should be removed from the court of public opinion by the feeling and decision of those men themselves, who rush daily from bad to worse and in a sort of blindness of mind tend toward outrages upon society, and whom their grave misdoing has branded as enemies alike to individuals and to the community, and guilty of the most atrocious inhumanity.

5. Therefore we proceed promptly to apply the remedies long demanded by the necessity of the case, and that too, feeling no concern about complaints that our corrective interference may, as coming unseasonably or unnecessarily, be considered cheaper or less valuable even in the eyes of the wicked, who, though seeing in our silence of so many years a lesson in self-restraint, nevertheless refused to follow it.

6. For who has so dull a breast, or is so alien to the feeling of humanity, that he can be ignorant, nay rather has not actually observed that in commodities which are bought and sold in markets or handled in the daily trade of cities, the wantonness in prices had progressed to such a point that the unbridled greed for plundering might be moderated neither by abundant supplies nor by fruitful seasons?

7. So that there is clearly no doubt that men of this sort, whom these occupations have engaged, are always mentally calculating and even seeking, from the motions of the stars, to take advantage of the very winds and seasons, and by reason of their wickedness cannot bear that the fields be watered and made productive by the rains of heaven, so as to give hope of future crops, since they consider it a personal loss for abundance to come to the world by the favorable moods of the sky itself.

8. And to the avarice of those who are always eager to turn to their own profit even the blessings of the gods, and to check the tide of general prosperity, and again in an unproductive year to haggle about the sowing of the seed and the business of retail dealers; who, individually possessed of immense fortunes which might have enriched whole peoples to their heart's content, seek private gain and are bent upon ruinous percentages of profit-to their avarice, ye men of our provinces, regard for common humanity impels us to set a limit.

9. But now, further, we must set forth the reasons themselves, whose urgency has at last compelled us to discard our too long protracted patience, in order that-although an avarice which runs riot through the whole world can with difficulty be laid bare by a specific proof, or rather fact-none the less the nature of our remedy may be known to be more just, when utterly lawless men shall be forced to recognize, under a definite name and description, the unbridled lusts of their minds.

10. Who therefore can be ignorant that an audacity that plots against the good of society is presenting itself with a spirit of profiteering, wherever the general welfare requires our armies to be directed, not only in villages and towns, but along every highway? That it forces up the prices of commodities not four-fold or eightfold, but to such a degree that human language cannot find words to set a proper evaluation upon their action? Finally, that sometimes by the outlay upon a single article the soldier is robbed both of his bounty and of his pay, and that the entire contributions of the whole world for maintaining the armies accrue to the detestable gains of plunderers, so that our soldiers seem to yield the entire fruit of their military career, and the labors of their entire term of service, to these profiteers in every-thing, in order that the pillagers of the commonwealth may from day to day carry off all that they resolve to have?

11. Being justly and duly moved by all these considerations above included, since already humanity itself seemed to be praying for release, we resolved, not that the prices of commodities should be fixed-for it is not thought just that this be done, since sometimes very many provinces exult in the good fortune of the low prices which they desire, and as it were in a certain privileged state of abundance-but that a maximum be fixed; in order that, when any stress of high prices made its appearance-which omen we prayed the gods might avert-avarice, which could not be checked on the so-to-speak endlessly extending plains, might be confined by the bounds of our statute and the limits set in the law promulgated to control them.

12. It is our pleasure, therefore, that those prices, which the concise items of the following list indicate, be held in attention throughout our whole domain, in such a way that all men understand that freedom to exceed them is removed; while at the same time, in those places where goods manifestly abound, the happy condition of cheap prices shall not thereby be hampered-and ample provision is made for cheapness, if avarice is limited and curbed.

13. Between sellers, moreover, and buyers whose custom it is to enter trading-ports and visit provinces overseas, this restraint will have to be a mutual action, that, while they already of themselves know that in the need imposed by high prices the price-limits cannot be exceeded, at

the time of retailing such a reckoning of places and bargainings and of the whole transaction be figured out, that under it there is manifestly a fair agreement that those who transport the goods shall nowhere sell at an unduly high price.

14. Because, therefore, it is an established fact that among our ancestors also the methods employed in new enactments was that boldness be curbed by a prescribed penalty-since very rarely is a status found for men which will benefit them with their free consent, but it is always fear, justest teacher of duties, which will restrain and guide them in the right path-it is our pleasure that if anyone have acted with boldness against the letter of this statute, he shall be subjected to capital punishment.

15. And let none think that a hard penalty is set, though when the time comes the observance of moderation will be a refuge for averting the peril.

16. He also shall be subject to the same peril, who in eagerness to purchase has come to an agreement with an avarice which retails in violation of the statutes.

17. From such guilt also he too shall not be considered free, who, having goods necessary for food or usage, shall after this regulation have thought that they might be withdrawn from the market; since the penalty ought to be even heavier for him who causes need than for him who makes use of it contrary to the statutes.

18. We therefore appeal to the devotion of all, that the decision made for the public welfare be observed with generous obedience and due scrupulousness, especially since by such a statute provision is manifestly made not only for the individual states and peoples and provinces, but for the whole world, for whose ruin a few, we learn, have raged exceedingly, whose greed neither length of time nor the riches which they are seen to have desired, have been able to moderate or satisfy.

-Translation from Rees, *Diocletian and the Tetrarchy*, 2004.

Schedule of Prices

An incomplete, but handy list of selected wages and goods can also be found in Rees, 2004.

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